THE 'IT' FACTOR

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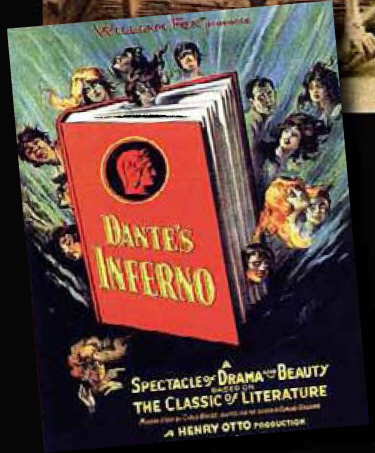

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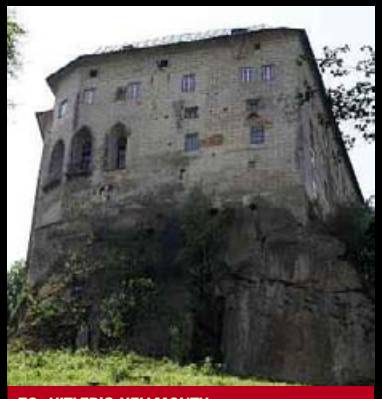
CONTENTS

the world of strange phenomena

26 THE DEVIL IN 3-D
The diabolical pleasures of the 'Diableries' stereoscopic cards

38 DARKNESS VISIBLE
Dante's Inferno on the cinema screen

32 A VISIT TO THE UNDERWORLD
Excavating an entrance to Hades



70 HITLER'S HELLMOUTH
The Satanic secrets of Hrad Houska

8 CLOWNS FROM HELL
Men with outsize feet spread fear

COVER: LONDON STEREOSCOPIC COMPANY
TOP FLASH: CLOWN ILLUSTRATION - OWEN RICHARDSON

Fortean Times 346

strange days

Rains of meat, catfish from the sky, creepy clowns, attack of the sea potatoes, world's oldest people, signals from space, self-immolating ancients, EU aliens, pioneer potheads and early brewers, the lost city that wasn't – and much more.

05 THE CONSPIRASPHERE
14 ARCHAEOLOGY
15 CLASSICAL CORNER
16 SCIENCE
22 NECROLOG
23 FAIRIES & FORTEANA
24 FLYING SORCERY
25 UFO CASEBOOK

features

COVER STORY

26 DIABLERIES: THE DEVIL IN 3-D
In the 19th century, Paris was overtaken by a new sensation – stereoscopic cards in which the Devil and all his works were shown in astonishing, and often humourously satirical, detail. **BRIAN MAY** tells how he fell under their diabolical spell and with fellow fiends **DENIS PELLERIN** & **PAULA FLEMING** explores the technological and cultural background of these hellish creations.

32 A VISIT TO THE UNDERWORLD
MIKE DASH examines the unsolved mystery of the tunnels at Baia. Did ancient priests fool visitors to a sulphurous subterranean stream into believing that they had crossed the River Styx and entered Hades?

38 DARKNESS VISIBLE: HELL IN THE CINEMA
Ever since the silent era, filmmakers have been putting their visions of Hell on the silver screen, and much of their inspiration derives from a 14th century Italian poet and a 19th century French artist. **PETER LAWS** descends to the fiery pits in search of the template for this celluloid inferno.

forum

51 Spirits of Place by FR Maher
52 There will be dragons by Jerome Clark

reports

44 STRANGE STATESMEN
No 14. All the world's a stage: Putin's virtual Russia

48 BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY
No 14. The Mothman Prophecies

70 FORTEAN TRAVELLER
No 108. Hrad Houska, Czech Republic

74 STORIES FROM THE ILLUSTRATED POLICE NEWS
No 51. Help! My baby was taken by a...

regulars

02 EDITORIAL
55 REVIEWS
65 LETTERS
69 IT HAPPENED TO ME
79 PHENOMENOMIX
80 STRANGE DEATHS

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editorial

A hell of an issue...

HELL ON EARTH

Welcome to our Hallowe'en issue, where we turn our attention to the spookier end of the fortean spectrum. This year, however, we avoid the usual trick-or-treaters – ghosts, ghouls, witches and werewolves – and focus instead on a place: Hell. Satan's infernal realm might not be an actual place, of course, but a theological conceit, a powerful metaphor, an existential state, or just other people; nonetheless, it has been searched for and sometimes found. The ancients believed Hades could be entered in the sulphurous environs of Lake Avernus, and – as Mike Dash explains (p32) – a controversial find made in the 1950s revealed a mysterious system of tunnels that might have been the setting for a ritualistic journey across the Styx. There are other candidates for the title of Gateway to Hell (see **FT260:46-48, 307:20-21**) and Mark Towse visited one such in the Czech Republic (p70): a spooky castle full of dark secrets, built, say the stories, over a gaping, abysmal pit whence emerged winged monsters and men driven mad.

"Reverend Green! Fancy seeing you here, you dark horse!"

MARTIN ROSS

In the 14th century, Dante made an imaginary descent into the titular Inferno of his poem, inspiring the epic visual treatment of Hell in Doré's celebrated 19th century illustrations, which in turn reverberated through the whole of the 20th century as filmmakers translated this rich seam of imagery into their own popcorn-fuelled visions of the abode of the damned, as Rev Peter Laws explains (p38). Cinema might have been the ultimate expression of 19th century optical technology, morphing into the dominant entertainment form of the 20th, but between Dante and DeMille there were all sorts of fascinating, if shorter-lived, media equally obsessed with the Devil and all his works. One of the most fascinating and bewitching of all remains the 'Diableries' – stereoscopic cards looked at through a special viewer that brought the exquisitely-wrought images to glorious three-dimensional life. These late-19th century creations drew on peculiarly French traditions of satirical literature and cartoons to mock both contemporary Parisian life and the old-fashioned Satan of the Church. Hell, in many of these remarkable images, looks a lot like ordinary life – and a lot like fun, to boot. Celebrated musician Brian May, and fellow members of the London Stereoscopic Company Denis Pellerin and Pauline Fleming, share some of the gems of their collections and provide some historical background to these playful visions of Hell on Earth (p26).

NO LAUGHING MATTER?

Coulrophobes should perhaps skip a few pages this issue or face their own personal Hell. While the annual 'Clown Service' in East London (p6) is an innocent affair, the activities of sinister clowns elsewhere – specifically the states of North and South Carolina – has been cause for concern. We've been reporting on similar 'creepy clown' panics for some time now, but this year's outbreak seems not only to show no sign of abating but is, as we go to press, spreading further afield. While the South Carolina incidents continued – from Lexington, SC, came a report of a clown and someone dressed as a bear (!) attempting to entice children into their car – news arrived of clown sightings across the southern States, in Louisiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia; there was even one weird outlier as far north as Pennsylvania. Some of these incidents were accompanied by threatening messages posted on social media, others appeared to have been fabricated by children, perhaps as pranks, malicious or otherwise. A full follow-up report will appear next issue.

Perhaps the increasingly visible figure of the creepy clown is set to displace more traditional Hallowe'en bogeymen (and women): around this time last year, Tonbridge in Kent was gripped by its own clown panic when a masked female figure was seen approaching young schoolchildren. Teachers issued warnings, the police investigated and parents fretted. The culprit turned out to be an 18-year-old girl who was "helping police with their enquiries". The cops suggested that the run-up to Hallowe'en was probably to blame for her activities, and that there was no connection with "a number of different reports in recent weeks, involving people travelling in vans and approaching children"; which might have been reassuring… aside from the fact that these mystery van drivers were also described as clowns… (*Kent Online, 9 + 23 Oct; D.Mirror, 17 Oct 2015*).

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

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strangedays

Falls of flesh and fish

Blood and meat on the roof, plus a plummeting catfish in Philadelphia

RAIN OF MEAT

On 6 September 2016, a woman in Puente Picún Leufú, a hamlet of 540 inhabitants in the Argentinean province of Neuquén, heard several bangs coming from her roof. Her neighbour thought it must be hail, although the sky was clear. When he went out to investigate, however, he found dozens of pieces of torn flesh and traces of blood. When the woman's husband returned from working in the fields, it was decided to report the incident to the police in Zapala. Blood and meat was found in a radius of 50m (164ft). The meat was fresh, lean and had no bones. It was said to be animal meat (rather than human?), but no more specific identification has been given so far. No one had heard any aircraft or helicopters in the vicinity. *Contexto (San Miguel de Tucuman, Argentina), losandes.com, 9 Sept 2016.*

• Flesh and blood fell at Chatillon-sur-Seine in France on 17 March 1669 (Records of French Academy); on Santa Clara County, California, in about June 1869 and in Los Nietos Township, California, on 1 August 1869 (San Francisco *Evening Bulletin*, 9 Aug 1869). Unspecified "animal matter" fell in Genoa, Italy, in 1870 (*Comptes Rendus* 56-972). For five to seven minutes on 27 August 1968, flesh and blood fell on an area of one square kilometre between Cocpava and São José dos Campos in Brazil (São Paulo papers, 30 Aug 1968).

Flakes of flesh fell from a clear sky on Allen Crouch's farm near Olympian Springs, Kentucky, on 3 March 1876, covering an area of 300ft by 150ft (91x46m). A witness found that the meat flakes – from 2x2in (5x5cm) to 4x4in (10x10cm) – were "perfectly fresh". He ate some and found they tasted like "mutton or venison". Analysis appearing in the publication *Medical Record* identified some samples as lung tissue from either a horse or a human infant. Further analysis also found some kind of animal cartilage. However, a local hunter, BF Ellington, confidently identified it as "bear meat". An actual sample can be viewed today at the Monroe Moosnick Medical and Science Museum at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. Perhaps the most feasible explanation was given in an 1876 edition of the *Louisville Medical News* by a Dr LD Kastenbine. He said it was a coordinated bout of projectile vulture vomit. Two species of vulture are found in Kentucky – the black vulture *Coragyps atratus* and the turkey vulture *Cathartes aura* – both of which are known to expel their stomach contents as either a defence mechanism or to make themselves light enough for flight. However, the witnesses to the meat rain saw neither vultures nor any other birds.

Sources: Fort, *Book of the Damned* (1919), chap.4; *New York Times*, 10 Mar 1876; *Scientific American*, Dec 2014; list of 'fafrotskies' (things that **FA**ll **FRO**m **T**he **SKIES**) compiled by Marion L Fawcett for Ivan T Sanderson's *Investigating the Unexplained*, 1972; Michell & Rickard, *Phenomena*, 1977, p.15.]

LISA LOBREE / FACEBOOK

ABOVE: Lisa Lobree and the offending, descending catfish.

At first, she thought there were fish guts on her face

CATFISH ASSAULT

At about 9am on 5 September 2016, Lisa Lobree was walking to a Labor Day exercise class near the Philadelphia Museum of Art when she heard a "rustling" in the trees, and was smacked in the face by a plummeting catfish. She collapsed screaming. "I think it might have been head, face and neck, because I smelled so bad afterwards," she said. At first, she thought there were fish guts on her face, but it turned out to be a cut near her left eye. Later, her face started swelling. Witnesses reported seeing a bird flying away – a vulture or hawk or eagle, maybe. The catfish was about 16in (40cm) long, and weighed about 5lb (2.3kg). Based on the height of the trees in the locality, Lobree said, the fish probably fell at least 50ft (15m), striking branches along the way. "It's a crazy, crazy thing," she said. That afternoon, she developed a 101-degree fever, which she said was rare for her. Her doctor prescribed antibiotics, but the fever went away on its own. It might have just been from the trauma, the doctor suggested. *Philadelphia Inquirer, 10 Sept; kcbd.com, 12 Sept 2016.*

FISHFALL IN BANFF

Kevin Bain from Banff, Aberdeenshire, asked for help in identifying 75 small fish, 2in (5cm) long, that appeared in his back garden on 11 August. He lives about 500m (1,640ft) from the sea and believed the fish were sand eels deposited by a waterspout. *BBC News, 12 Aug 2016.*

Fish falls, of course, are a fortean favourite. Many have occurred without accompanying wind, and fish have sometimes fallen on the same spot for such extended periods of time (up to 10 minutes) that constantly moving whirlwinds would seem to be ruled out.

Scores of small fish fell in the Chilaw district of west Sri Lanka on 5 May 2014. They were 3in to 5in (5-8cm) long with a total weight of 110lb (50kg). Those that were still alive were put in buckets of water and later eaten [**FT315:5**]. Paul Cropper has recently suggested an earthbound explanation for some of the sudden appearances of spangled perch in the arid Australian outback [**FT345:24**].

HAVING THE 'IT' FACTOR
Creepy clowns spread fear and loathing across the Carolinas
PAGE 8

I WANT TO LIVE FOREVER
The world's super-centenarians and their tips for a long, happy life
PAGE 18

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER
Jean-Claude Juncker says that ET is keeping an eye on the EU.
PAGE 24

The Conspirasphere

NOEL ROONEY wonders what millennials make of 9/11, and finds that the 15th anniversary of the fall of the twin towers wasn't always marked in the best possible taste...

It is 15 years since the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the biggest terrorist attack in modern history, which heralded the infamous War on Terror, and triggered more conspiracy theories than any event since the assassination of John F Kennedy and perhaps beyond. It was the first such event to be broadcast live across 24-hour media, and the first of that scale to occur during the age of the Internet; so its treatment in both the mainstream and contrarian communities served as templates for much of what has followed.

Looking at how the anniversary is being treated in various media environments, a number of things occurred to me. All of them hinge on how 9/11 has entered the dubious category of 'historical events', and the position it now occupies in the folk memory of millions of people, by no means all of them American. Whatever your opinion on the events of 9/11, there is no doubt about its uniquely important place in recent history.

Or is there? I was intrigued by a number of articles and videos recording the views of younger Americans; a whole generation has emerged that is too young to have had the visceral experience of the tragedy shared by most of this article's readers. The vague awareness those young people display, and their lack of factual knowledge about the event, shocked me. An era-defining event that occurred only 15 years ago has become, for many, no more than a vague, ominous shape in the miasma that is the historical past.

For those who do remember, often with a strange, dream-like clarity, where they were and what they were doing when the first plane struck the North tower, a very different 9/11 looms over almost all other recent historical and political events, one which shapes and defines opinions and attitudes, particularly in the Conspirasphere. It occupies a canonical position in (to borrow and slightly wrench a term from Slavoj Žižek) the parallax pantheon, and acts as a shibboleth betraying one's entire attitude to the legitimacy, or otherwise, of the received view of recent, and indeed all, history. You either believe that 19 Islamic terrorists, inspired if not commissioned by Osama bin Laden, pulled off the crime of the century, or you believe that the whole event was some form of false flag and that mainstream explanations are fatally flawed. There is no middle position on 9/11, and both default positions are nothing more or less than articles of faith.

In the light of all this, some of the anniversary phenomena appearing online are puzzling and even bizarre. The weirdest came from the world of advertising, real and otherwise. First, there was the Walmart tribute feature laid on by Coca Cola, featuring twin towers of, yes, Coke bottles, in a Florida store. Then there was the 9/11 Twin Towers promotion by Miracle Mattress in Texas, a video ad featuring twin towers of mattresses flown into by smiling salespeople, with the breathtakingly tasteless 'We will never forget' strapline spoken in all sincerity, apparently. Finally, there was the hoax Subway advert posted by venerable satirical magazine *The Onion*, offering two foot-long Subs for $9.11, and featuring a flying consumer about to demolish the towering snacks.

Would any other human tragedy on a similar scale provoke such unsubtle slabs of post-modernist humour? I doubt it, and I wonder what that says about 9/11, and about us.

https://sputniknews.com/art_living/20160909/1045151206/911-millennials-mark-dice.html; www.cnet.com/news/mattress-stores-911-ad-appalls-the-web/; www.cnet.com/news/coca-cola-takes-down-walmart-display-in-shape-of-911-twin-towers/subway-honors-the-onions-offensive-9-11-coupon-1324655816

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Canaries try to tempt visitors from their hotels

Guardian, 25 July 2015.

FIREMAN 'ABUSED WITH A SAUSAGE'

Sun, 18 July 2015.

Wandering worms use slugs like a taxi for long-distance journeys

D.Telegraph, 13 July 2015.

Male bearded dragons that change sex make better mothers, study finds

ABC News (Australia), 2 July 2015.

Cardinals hacking probe includes home in Jupiter

Palm Beach (FL) Post, 20 June 2015.

GERMAN TRAFFIC LIGHT HAS BEEN RED FOR 28 YEARS

D.Mirror (online), 20 June 2015.

SEND IN THE CLOWNS

On 7 February 2016, clowns gathered at All Saints Church in Haggerston, London, for the 70th service commemorating celebrated English clown Joseph Grimaldi (1778-1837). An annual tradition since 1946, the service has seen a steady decline in the number of clowns in attendance, perhaps a sign of our coulrophobic times. For the Anglican Church's own clown priest, see p22; and for clowns of a distinctly creepy variety, turn the page. PHOTOS: DAN KITWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

MATTIE

MARINE

SIDELINES...

TINY DISASTER

After weeks of intricate work, Willard Wigan, 58, had almost finished a minuscule sculpture of the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, small enough to be displayed in the eye of a needle, when he breathed in and swallowed it. *Sun, 7 July 2016.*

GOD'S PUNISHMENT

Christian lobbyist Tony Perkins, 53, president of the Family Research Council, said last year that God sends natural disasters as punishment for abortion and gay marriage, and that pædophilia is a "homosexual problem". On 13 August 2016 he fled his Louisiana house in a canoe when it was inundated with floodwater 10ft (3m) deep. *Independent online, 18 Aug 2016.*

HOOKED BY THE JOHNSON

Nudist swimmer 'Herbert Fendt' (pseudonym) felt a sharp pain, found a fishing line and realised an angler had hooked his penis. The incident happened at the Kaisersee, a lake in Augsburg, Bavaria. Fendt cried out "Do not pull! Do not pull!" The angler cut the line and the hook was removed in hospital. *D.Mirror (online), 23 Aug 2016.*

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Stuart Price, 36, was cycling through Gordano Valley near Bristol when he saw a hyena running wild. "People are going to laugh at this," he said, "but I heard it and saw it." He reported it to the police and was told: "It was not the first". However, Avon and Somerset Police had no record of any hyena sightings. *Sun, 19 Aug 2016.*

OUT OF LUCK

Mr Zou, a Chinese motorist, paid more than £100,000 for a 'lucky 88888 licence plate, believing he would be blessed by good fortune. However, police stopped him eight times in one day, not believing it was authentic. Mr Zou concluded it was "just too much trouble". *D.Telegraph, 30 June 2016.*

Creepy clowns return

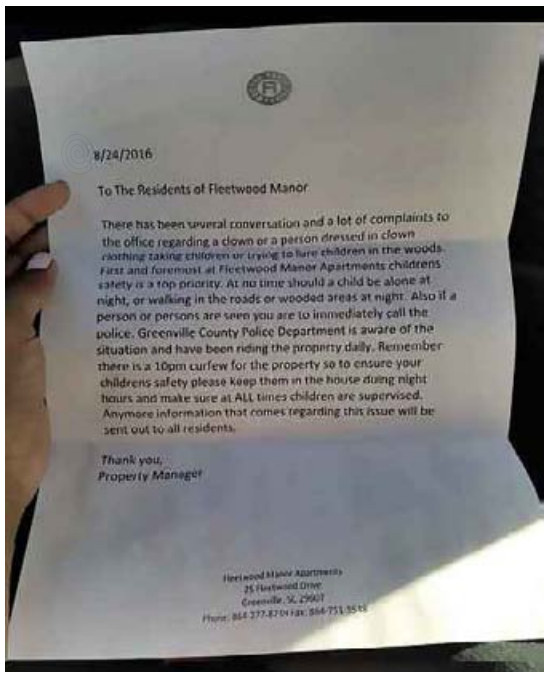
Men in oversized shoes spread fear across the Carolinas

LEFT: Fleetwood Manor, where clowns were reportedly luring local children into nearby woods.
BELOW: The letter warning residents about the creepy clowns.

Residents of the small South Carolina town of Greenville were on high alert for sightings of sinister clowns following reports that men with luminous noses and oversized shoes might be trying to lure children into nearby woods. There had been "a lot of complaints to the office regarding a clown or a person dressed in clown clothing taking children or trying to lure children in the woods," administrators of Fleetwood Manor Apartments wrote to residents on 24 August.

Police began daily patrols of the town and the apartment complex, where parents said their children had come home with stories of speaking to clowns. Resident Donna Arnold said she called the police after one of her sons told her he had seen a clown behind the basketball court. The next day about 30 children came up to her and told her that there were clowns in the woods. "It's illegal. It's dangerous. It's inappropriate, and it's creating community concern so it needs to stop," said Greenville's police chief, who cited a state law banning residents over 16 from wearing a mask or anything else that hides their identity in public, unless for means of employment.

The sightings began on 19 August when an unnamed resident told the police that her son had seen clowns "whispering and making strange noises" in the nearby woods. The resident said she later saw "several clowns in the woods flashing green laser lights" before running away. The following night, at around 10pm, the woman said that her elder son heard "chains and banging" at their front door. Around 2pm on 20 August, another resident said she came across "a large-figured clown with blinking nose", standing under a street light near the garbage dumpster area." The clown waved at her so she waved back and kept walking. Police also interviewed children who told them clowns tried "to persuade them into the woods further by displaying large amounts of money." A 12-year-old told them they had seen two clowns in their garden. One had red hair and the other a white mask and body suit. The children said they believed the clowns lived in a house near a pond at the end of a trail in the woods. Police found the house, but no clowns or any signs of suspicious activity.



8/24/2016

To The Residents of Fleetwood Manor

There has been several conversation and a lot of complaints to the office regarding a clown or a person dressed in clown clothing taking children or trying to lure children in the woods. First and foremost at Fleetwood Manor Apartments childrens safety is a top priority. At no time should a child be alone at night, or walking in the roads or wooded areas at night. Also if a person or persons are seen you are to immediately call the police. Greenville County Police Department is aware of the situation and have been riding the property daily. Remember there is a 10pm curfew for the property so to ensure your childrens safety please keep them in the house during night hours and make sure at ALL times children are supervised. Anymore information that comes regarding this issue will be sent out to all residents.

Thank you,
Property Manager

One motorist caught a fleeting glimpse of a figure standing by the side of the road wearing a "clown mask" and a clear rain poncho before disappearing into the woods. On 30 August, children chased two clowns through the Shemwood Apartments complex. One had a red nose and red hair but no face paint. The clowns broke through a wooden fence to get away. A third clown was waiting in a car – said to be

a new model black Honda. The other two clowns jumped in and they sped off. Earlier that day, over 600 miles (965km) away in Columbus, Ohio, a 14-year-old boy on his way to school at about 6.15am said a 6ft (1.8m) man in a clown mask, dressed all in black, wearing a glove on his right hand and a bandage on his left, chased him with a knife. He was able to get away by hurling a rock at the menacing figure and running to a bus stop.

On 31 August a particularly observant woman saw a man dressed as a clown standing and starring at her while she was in a Greenville laundromat around 5:20pm. He didn't say anything. She left, but he didn't follow her. She said he was 35 to 45 years old, 5ft10in (178cm) and slightly overweight (190-210lb/86-95kg). He was clean-shaven, had dark eyes, and was wearing a white swimmer's cap with neon or red hair coming out of the sides, and white face paint with a black painted line starting between his eyebrows and ending at his upper lip. He was wearing a grey long-sleeve T-shirt, white gloves, and white "balloon" pants. He smelled of house paint.

Around 10.25pm the same day, a woman in Spartanburg in a neighbouring county saw someone dressed as a clown in her backyard. She took a photo and the person ran off. She called the police, but her photo was too dark to make out any identifying detail.

Kelly Montford, owner of Over the Top Entertainment, which arranges ordinary clownish entertainment, said: "I believe there is a chance that [the clown sightings] could be a big publicity stunt for someone, a haunted house or some sort of production that will be coming in the next few months." One theory was that the clowns were connected to the release of the independent horror movie *31*, by director Rob Zombie. A preview of the movie, which features a gang of sadistic clowns, was screened on 1 September at a Greenville cinema. People might have been thinking of an event a few weeks earlier in Green Bay, Wisconsin. A dishevelled clown was spotted

ABOVE: This clown photo went viral but turned out to be a film publicity stunt.

Police began daily patrols of the town and apartments

roaming the streets at night carrying four black balloons. Photos of the clown went viral, but the whole thing turned out to be a marketing ploy for a film.

Around 8.30pm on 4 September, a clown in Winston-Salem, North Carolina – some 175 miles (280km) northeast of Greenville – tried to lure children into the woods with treats. He was reportedly seen by two children and heard, but not seen, by one adult. He was wearing white overalls, white gloves, red shoes with red bushy hair, a white face and a red nose. He fled the area when police arrived. A second clown sighting happened just after midnight, two miles from the first. The next day, a clown armed with a machete tried (unsuccessfully) to lure a woman into woods near Walkertown.

Yet another clown was spotted in Greensboro, Guilford County, North Carolina, on 6 September. From his balcony at Oakridge Apartments near Interstate 73, Chris Bass saw a man in a white mask, red curly hair, yellow dotted shirt, blue clown pants and clown shoes. He gave chase waving a machete, but the clown escaped into woodland.

On 14 September, police in LaGrange, Georgia, charged Brandon Moody (26) and Rebecca Moody (27) with making separate false reports claiming that people dressed as clowns were trying to lure children into a white van. The police found two people in a white van who had run out of petrol, but no clown masks or costumes. The Moodies then admitted their calls were a hoax. On 15 September, several cryptic posts from the Facebook page of a group known as the 'Flomo Klowns' put two southern Alabama schools – Flomaton High School and Flomaton Elementary School in Atmore – on lock down until 11.30am. Earlier reports said that the clowns were sighted near the schools but a police spokesman said this was inaccurate.

A 2014 poll by Rasmussen Reports found that 43 per cent of Americans don't like circus clowns, and millions of Americans may actually suffer when they see one – a condition labelled coulrophobia. *[CNN] 28 Aug; nbc4.com, D.Telegraph, 31 Aug; fox6now.com, 1 Sept; nydailynews.com, newser.com, 2 Sept; [R] 3 Sept; [AAP] 4 Sept; myfox8.com, 5+6 Sept; wnd.com, 6 Sept; Huffington Post, 7 Sept; NBC News, 8 Sept 2016; [AP] al.com (Alabama Media Group), 15 Sept 2016.*

• Waves of creepy clown sightings occur somewhere (especially in the US) almost every year, including the last three years [**FT307:8, 311:20-21, 321:4, 322:16, 333:23**]. See also "Don't send in the clowns" by Tim Weinberg and Ben Radford [**FT226:34-41**].

SIDELINES...

MORE BLOODY TEARS

Church-goers at the remote venue in Manuripi-Heath Amazonian Wildlife National Reserve in Bolivia claim a statue of the Virgin Mary began weeping blood around 12 August. Samples of the liquid were taken to medics at a local beach hut to work out if it was human. Meanwhile in Colombia, another BVM statue was attracting pilgrims after it reportedly cried a single tear of blood. *dailystar.co.uk, 19 Aug 2016.*

BAD VIBRATIONS

A hum, first noticed by residents near Ponsanooth, Cornwall, in May, was still unexplained in July. The low frequency vibration could be felt through the floor and even through furniture. Emma Williams said it was present 24 hours a day, every day. Her husband couldn't hear it, but her daughter and other visitors could. One sleepless night, Mrs Williams went driving to see how far the hum could be heard; at 12 miles (19km), it disappeared. *Western Morning News, 2 July 2016.*

RIPE FOR RIBBING

Celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's new son has been named River Rocket Oliver. His older siblings are Poppy Honey (14), Daisy Boo (12), Petal Blossom (seven), and Buddy Bear (five). *D.Telegraph, 25 Aug 2016.*

AVIAN GRATITUDE

There is a well-documented case of a woman regularly feeding a robin on the sill of her open bedroom window. When she was ill and in bed, unable to feed it, the bird flew into the room and tried to feed her some worms. *BBC Wildlife, Aug 2016.*

MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

ACCIDENTAL REFUGEE

A 31-year old backpacker from, Beijing had his wallet stolen in Heidelberg in early July and attempted to find a police station, but ended up at an office handling asylum applications. Speaking neither German nor English, he signed an asylum application form, had his passport confiscated and fingerprints taken, and was held for 12 days at a Red Cross hostel at Duelmen near Dortmund. Noticing that he was unusually well-dressed, staff suspected a mistake and sought help from a Mandarin speaker at a local Chinese restaurant. The tourist was released to continue his European walking tour. *BBC News, 8 Aug; [R] Sydney Morning Herald, 10 Aug 2016.*

DELAYED REVENGE

A retired company director was obliged to pay $4,500 in costs after destroying his mother's gravestone with a hammer. Larry Zalcman, 64, was seen desecrating his mother's grave by a cemetery attendant in Long Ditton, Surrey, in November 2015. *D.Telegraph, 27 June 2016.*

CAT BURGLAR

Sarah Nathan, from Hamilton in New Zealand, was puzzled to find "odd pieces" of men's clothing in her washing basket. She then realised that Brigit, a Tonkinese cat, was bringing in the items. In two months, her six-year-old pet had stolen 11 pairs of underpants and 50 socks. *D.Telegraph, 22 Mar 2016.*

MARTIN ROSS

OFFBEAT DIETS

ON THE MENU: KNIVES, GRAVEL, VINEGAR, HAIR, WASHING POWDER AND LEMON CURD SANDWICHES

• Jarnail Singh, 42, arrived at a hospital in Amritsar, northern India, complaining of low appetite, weight loss and stomach pains. The police officer was found to have 40 knives in his stomach, which were removed in a five-hour operation by five surgeons on 19 August. "Some were found folded, some were open, and some had even started rusting and were broken," said Dr Jatinder Malhotra. Singh had swallowed the knives – some 7in (18cm) long – over two months. He had no idea why he started eating knives but said that he "loved" their taste. *[CNN] 22 Aug <i> 24 Aug 2016.*

• "I love the taste of gravel and eat sand with my tea, bread, and even soup," stonemason Hans Raj, 45, told reporters in Uttar Pradesh, India. "I have been eating bricks and rocks for around 25 years now, and have never fallen sick. But people who eat normal food fall sick often. I work in the building trade, and often take out a loose brick or the crumbly parts of someone's house to eat. That's the only way for me to get my regular dose of rocks. In my opinion, the minerals in sand give me energy, as do bits of masonry. My teeth are absolutely fine, and I have suffered no problems in stomach or mouth." Last year an Indian woman – Sudama Devi from Kajri Noorpur – claimed that she had never been ill because she ate 2lb (0.9kg) of sand every day, taking it like "sugar after a meal". *Metro, 15 May 2015; Sun, 10 Feb; Hindustan Times, 16 Feb 2016.*

• Ella Ruby Ginn, 19, a make-up artist from Hastings, East Sussex, drinks two litre-bottles of vinegar every week. She even carries sachets in her handbag in case she needs a fix while out and about. "I can't remember when it started but I was very young," she said. "I just love it. My boyfriend does think it's weird, but he's really

DINESH DUBEY / BARCROFT IMAGES

RIGHT: Police officer Jarnail Singh had no idea why he started eating knives, but had consumed 40 of them.

sweet and goes out on vinegar runs for me. I drink at least a glass a day, and have it on all my food too. If I have chips, I drown them in it." She used to favour classic malt vinegar, but after loosing 42lb (19kg) last year she switched to apple cider vinegar, which can help to shed further pounds. The British Nutrition Foundation warned that her habit could cause acid reflux and dental damage. *Sun, D.Star, 25 Feb 2016.*

• Nikki Garber, 19, loves washing powder and eats a 500g (17.6oz) tub of Surf every week. At the time of the news report (*Sunday Star*, 17 July 2016), she had consumed more than 100 boxes (50kg/110lb) of powder. "It makes me feel relaxed and happy," she said. "A bit like being on a high." Her addiction started when she was 17 and living at a boarding school in Tunbridge Wells. She now eats Surf while watching TV or doing her media studies at Coventry University. The compulsion to eat earth, baking powder and other non-foods is known as pica (Latin for magpie, a bird notorious for eating almost anything). Another washing powder addict was reported in 2012: Tempestt [sic] Henderson, 19, a nursing student from Florida [**FT288:10-11**].

• For 16 years Jodie Brown, 17, of Wolverhampton lived on nothing but lemon curd sandwiches. Any other food made her gag and she avoided eating away from home. She was cured of what is called Selective Eating Disorder with hypnotherapy. She can now eat a range of foods including olives, fajitas and seaweed. "I can't even bear to look at lemon curd sandwiches any more," she said. Also cured by hypnotherapy was Alison McGregor, 23, a call centre worker from Dublin who had eaten nothing but chips, waffles and crisps her entire life. *Sun, 21+28 July; Metro, 28 July 2016.*

• Gary Watkinson, 25, a personal trainer from Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, lives on baked beans on toast – the beans have to be Branston. In an emergency, if he can't get hold of beans, he can just about manage chips, mash, or ice cream. His girlfriend, Beth Hall, said: "He's never ill, he has spotless skin, his hair glows, he's full of energy and goes to the gym for two hours a day… It is so annoying." *Sun, 8 July 2015.*

JASMINE PERCIVAL

ABOVE: Jasmine Percival's hairball weighed in at an impressive 3lb (1.4kg).

"I can't even bear to look at lemon curd sandwiches"

• John Pearson, 48, an engineer from Etwell, Derbyshire, claims to hate food. He only eats 10 things: chips, plain crisps, cereal, chocolate cake, soft cheese, Yorkshire pudding, nuts, bread, butter – and Marmite, of which he eats 2lb (0.9kg) a month. He says the yeasty spread – rich in B vitamins, folic acid and niacin, helping the body fight infections – is the only reason he stays healthy. He is a black belt in karate. *D.Mail, 21 Feb 2015.*

• As a toddler, Daniel Pennock, now 26, ate a varied diet, but from the age of four he refused almost anything except sausage and chips, a plate of which he has consumed every day for the last 22 years. The swimming pool lifeguard and father of two from Wakefield, West Yorkshire, says he is physically sick if virtually any other foods go near his mouth. He can only manage bread, crisps, apples, bananas and sausage rolls for the odd snack. He has never eaten out at a restaurant. He hopes for professional help to overcome his limited diet. *D.Express, D.Star, 19 April 2016.*

• Philip Patrick, 19, from Worcester, eats 12 bowls of cereal a day, each topped with 10 spoonfuls of sugar. He sticks to one cereal – mainly Weetabix or cornflakes – and washes it down with a cup of tea, with six more sugars. He gets through six boxes of cereal and 19 pints of milk a week and a 5kg (11lb) bag of sugar every nine days. The bizarre diet has seen him put on 25kg (56lb) in three years and cost him his pub job. "I need help to get my life back," he said. *Sun, 1 Feb 2016.*

• When Jasmine Percival was 14, she began to suffer excruciatingly painful stomach-aches, and one day collapsed at school. She was diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome, but the pains continued. She was unable to hold down most foods and her weight dropped to 70lb (32kg). In December 2009 she awoke in agony and was rushed to hospital. A giant hairball weighing over 3lb (1.4kg) was removed from her stomach by Cæsarean section. It was one of the largest ever recorded. All her life she had sucked and chewed on her long, dark brown hair, a habit she was unable to break, despite warnings. She made a full recovery and no longer chews her hair. *Sun on Sunday, 21 Aug 2016.*

SIDELINES...

SNAP-1

When Zaphnath-paanneah Morley of Shepshed, Leicestershire, declared in 1966 that no one else had his name, Zaphnath-paanneah Beardsley travelled from Arnold, Nottingham, to meet him. It turned out they were both great grandsons of Zaphnath-paanneah Morley of Thringstone, Leicestershire. *Loughborough Echo ("50 years ago"), 15 June 2016.*

SNAP-2

Aaron Booth (22) attacked Aaron Booth (age not given) in the early hours of 12 December 2015 in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, biting the left side of his chin. He was fined £245 for assault at Furness Magistrates' Court. According to his lawyer, he was too drunk to recall much of what happened. We are not told whether he knew his victim shared his name. *North-West Eve. Mail, 28 Jan 2016.*

AN ARTWORK, PERHAPS?

More than 40 dead pigeons were placed, a few hundred yards apart, along the white lines in the middle of the A35 near Honiton, Devon, on 3 August. Nearby was an animal feed bag probably used to transport the birds, and a large amount of feathers. In 2015, 16 dead pigeons were found in a box in a park in Southall, London. Both events remain unexplained. *telegraph.co.uk, 3 Aug 2016.*

SECRET LODGER

Trina Hibbert, woken at 4.30am on 20 June after her table lamp crashed to the floor, found a 5m (16ft) scrub python curled around her bed. It was believed that the snake had been living in the walls and ceiling of her house, near Cairns in Australia, for years. Trina had seen it 15 years earlier when it poked its head into the bathroom as she took a shower. Estimated to weigh nearly 40kg (88lb), it was caught and released in the bush. *Times, 23 June 2016.*

MOST TRAVELLED BIRD

An Arctic tern has completed the longest migration ever recorded, flying 96,000km (59,653 miles) from the Farne Islands off the coast of Northumberland, down the coast of West Africa to the Weddell Sea in Antarctica – and back again. During its lifetime, the tern will complete its journey enough times to clock up around 3,000,000km (1,864,165 miles). *D.Telegraph, 7 June 2016*.

FOXY SABOTEURS

A spate of severed brake cables in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, forced car owners to fork out for expensive repairs. Wildlife expert John Bryant, 74 [see **FT73:35-37**] established that fox cubs had been chewing through the cables because they enjoy the taste of glycol, a sweet chemical used in brake fluid. Kent police received six reports of cable damage between 18 and 31 May, five of which came from the same area. *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 3 June 2016*.

DANGEROUS MENU

A Jack Russell had his jaw glued shut for more than five hours after chewing on a takeaway menu that came through the letterbox in Hemel Hempstead. The glossy paper of the Domino's Pizza menu mixed with 10-year-old Alfie's saliva to form a cement-like substance. A vet couldn't work out how to prise his mouth open, but eventually hunger drove Alfie to force his jaws open himself. *D.Mail, 28 June 2016.*

MARTIN ROSS

Ocean-borne oddities

MARK WATKINS / FACEBOOK

ABOVE: Not a floating ET visitor but an inflated whale carcass. **BELOW:** These Cornish finds aren't alien eggs, just sea potatoes.

BLUBBER BALLOON

Fisherman Mark Watkins spotted this weird object about 30 miles (50km) southwest of Bunbury, Australia, in late July. He thought it could be another boat or a balloon, but as he got closer, a pungent odour revealed it was a whale carcass. The species was not identified, but the texture of its belly suggests it was a humpback or southern right whale. When jostled or manipulated, such a carcass can explode, spewing whale guts and emitting a punishing smell.

Scavengers aren't usually able to puncture a whale's thick skin and blubber when the carcass is floating in the sea. Eventually the body will naturally deflate and sink, intact, to the seafloor. These events, known as "whalefalls", provide a staggering amount of resources for deep-sea creatures, and entire aquatic communities can thrive on the food a carcass provides. The breakdown of a dead whale can take up to 30 years. *Sun, 30 July; livescience.com, 3 Aug 2016.*

'ALIEN' BEACH INVADERS

Hundreds of odd-looking orbs washed up on beaches in Devon and Cornwall on 17 August.

DOLFILMS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Were they alien eggs, esoteric vegetables, baseballs designed by HR Giger, or what? Jess Arnieson from Newbury, Berkshire, encountered some on the sand while walking her dog on holiday in Penzance. "No one knows what they are, but everyone is worried," she said. "They are all over the beach and the dog really didn't like them," said another dog walker, who found hundreds on the coast at Long Rock, between Penzance and Marazion. "I took one home with me, then panicked and put it in the bin in case it attacked."

In fact, they were sea potatoes (*Echinocardium cordatum*), a harmless species of sea urchin related to starfish and usually covered with little spines. They can grow up to 3in (7.6cm) in diameter and survive in waters up to 656ft (200m) deep. Mass strandings are not usual as the urchins congregate for breeding, meaning many can wash up together after a storm. This is thought to be the biggest mass mortality of sea potatoes since May 1995, when hundreds of them washed up on the south coast of England. Back then, the deaths were caused by exceptionally calm waters – which allowed a thick bloom of plankton to settle on top of the seabed, and suffocate the urchins. *Guardian (online), Sun (online), 19 Aug; Sunday Telegraph, 21 Aug 2016.*

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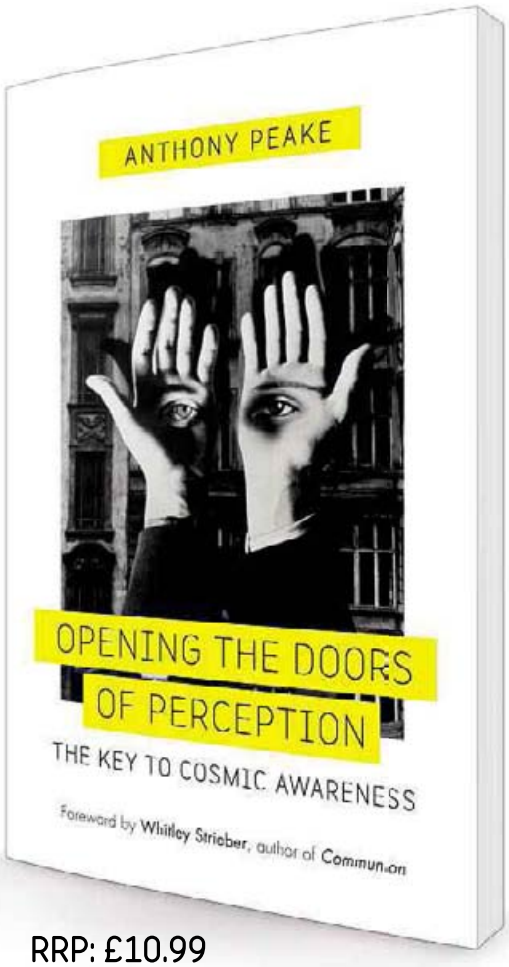
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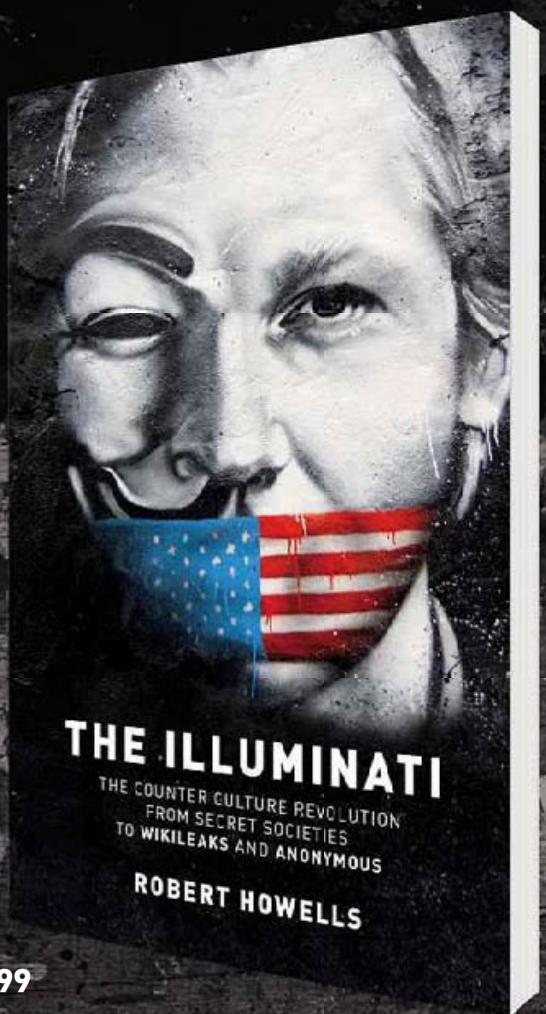

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ARCHÆOLOGY

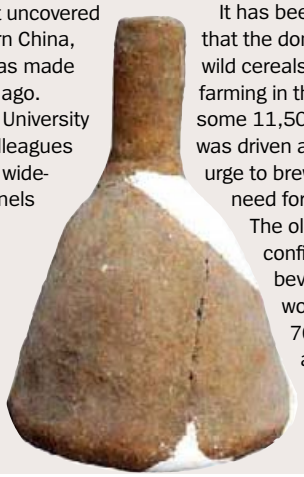
PAUL SIEVEKING digs through the latest archæological discoveries and finds evidence of ancient Chinese beer-making, early stoners in Europe and Asia and a 'lost city' created by a natural geological phenomenon...

PIONEER POTHEADS

During a short time window at the end of the last Ice Age, people in Europe and Asia independently began using cannabis, according to a review of cannabis archæology, which links an intensification of cannabis use in East Asia with the rise of transcontinental trade at the dawn of the Bronze Age, some 5,000 years ago. Central Eurasia's Yamnaya people – thought to be one of the three key tribes that founded European civilisation – dispersed eastwards at this time and are thought to have spread cannabis, and possibly its psychoactive use, throughout Eurasia. The herb's pollen, fruit and fibres have been turning up in Eurasian archæological digs for decades. It is often assumed that cannabis was first used, and possibly domesticated, somewhere in China or central Asia – but a database of all the archæological literature suggests that the herb entered the archæological record of Japan and Eastern Europe at almost exactly the same time, between about 11,500 and 10,200 years ago. "The cannabis plant seems to have been distributed widely from as early as 10,000 years ago, or even earlier," says Tengwen Long of the Free University of Berlin, one of the scholars who compiled the database. *New Scientist online, 15 July 2016.*

CHEERS!

Residue left on an apparent beer-making toolkit uncovered in Shaanxi, northern China, shows how beer was made some 5,000 years ago. Jiajing Wang at the University of Stanford and colleagues found remnants of wide-mouthed pots, funnels and amphoræ that would have been used for beer brewing, filtration and storage. They contained microscopic starch fragments and phytoliths, silica structures found in cereal husks. These deposits came from broomcorn millet, Job's tears, barley and tubers such as snake gourd root. "Many of the starch grains were damaged, and the damage patterns precisely match the morphological changes developed during malting and mashing," said Wang. The team also found oxalates, organic compounds associated with the mashing and fermentation of cereals.



It has been suggested that the domestication of wild cereals at the birth of farming in the Neolithic era some 11,500 years ago was driven as much by the urge to brew beer as far the need for food [**FT272:17**]. The oldest chemically confirmed alcoholic beverage in the world, dating to 7000-6600 BC at nearby Jiahu in the Yellow River valley, was found by Pat McGovern in 2004. Pottery fragments showed evidence of tartrates, beeswax and rice. The tartrates could have come from grapes, but are more likely to be from the Chinese hawthorn fruit, which had a high sugar content and could harbour the yeast for fermentation [**FT195:19**]. McGovern said Wang and colleagues have made a compelling case for the emergence of more specialised beverages during succeeding millennia. The only other chemically confirmed evidence for barley beer brewing at a similar time (c. 3000 BC) comes from sites in Egypt and Iran. *New Scientist online, 23 May 2016.*

ABOVE: What were thought to be the ruins of a long-lost city off Zakynthos are in fact natural formations. **BELOW:** A bit of ancient Chinese beer-making kit.

THE SITE WAS CREATED UP TO FIVE MILLION YEARS AGO

The oldest tea ever found has been retrieved from pits around the tomb of Liu Qi, the fourth Han emperor who lived between 188 and 141 BC, in the Chinese city of Xian. Mass spectrometry showed that the plant remains came from the genus *Camellia*. The oldest written reference to tea dates from 59 BC. According to a legend dating back to the Tang Dynasty, Bodhidharma, the founder of Chan Buddhism, accidentally fell asleep while meditating in front of a wall for nine years. He woke up in such disgust at his weakness that he cut off his own eyelids – which fell to the ground and took root, growing into tea bushes. Tea was first used as a medicine; when it was first consumed as a stimulant is unknown. *D.Telegraph, 29 Jan 2016.*

'LOST CITY' OF ZAKYNTHOS

When divers spotted apparent colonnades and courtyards in shallow water off the Greek island of Zakynthos in 2013, they thought they had discovered the ruins of a long-forgotten civilisation. However, research published in the journal *Marine Petroleum Geology* in June 2016 revealed that the site was created by a natural geological phenomenon that took place up to five million years ago in the Pliocene era. What superficially looked like architectural remains under two to five metres (7-16ft) of water were actually shapes formed by the release of methane from cracks in the sea floor. The methane interacted with microbe-rich sediment to create a build-up of natural cement, which was then shaped by erosion. This natural explanation was not initially entertained because gas escapes of this kind usually occur at far greater depths. "The disc and doughnut morphology, which looked a bit like circular column bases, is typical of mineralisation at hydrocarbon seeps," said Prof Julian Andrews, lead author of the study. "This kind of phenomenon is quite rare in shallow waters. The same thing happens in the North Sea and it is also similar to the effects of fracking." *D.Telegraph, 3 June; D.Mail, 4 June 2016.*

UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

204: BURNING SENSATIONS

"I'll not experiment, but I assume I could flip matches all day at a wall, and not set wallpaper afire" – Fort, *Books,* p924.

In 1960s Vietnam we had the priestly auto-ignitions dismissed by Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu as "Buddhist barbeques".

More recently, the short-lived 'Arab Spring' was sparked by Tunisian street-vendor Tarek al-Tayeh Mohamed Bouazizi's self-combustion. Other modern examples in Michael Biggs's *Dying without Killing: Self-Immolations* 1963-2002 (2003).

Classical, as usual. Wifely Suttee was widespread, not just in India: Aelian, *Miscellaneous History*, bk8 ch18; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations,* bk5 ch27 para78; Hyginus, *Fables,* no104; Plutarch, *Moralia*, para499c; Propertius, *Poems,* bk4 no12 vv15-22; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Words & Deeds*, bk2 ch6 para14. Cf. W Heckel & JC Yardley, *Philologus* 125, 1981, 305-11.

Not just willing or unwilling women. It was also common (Lucian, *Runaways*, ch7 para1) among Indian Gymnosophists (Naked Sages), the most spectacular one witnessed by Alexander the Great, verbally illuminated by his biographer Arrian (bk7 ch3).

Two glowing Greek cases. First, the philosopher Empedocles (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, bk8 ch69; Horace, *Art of Poetry*, vv465-8) jumped into Mount Aetna (would that Ingrid Bergman had done the same in the 1950 movie *Stromboli*), this fiery self-immolation proved by the volcano obligingly spewing out one of his golden sandals, plus providing poetic inspiration for Matthew Arnold's 1852 *Empedocles on Etna*, erupting into such rhodomantade as: "Leap and roar, thou sea of fire! / My soul glows to meet you! / Ere it flag, ere the mists of despondency and gloom rush over it again / Receive me! Save me!"

Like Madame Nhu, Richard Osborne reported in true Lucianic spirit with his anti-Arnoldian couplet, "Great Empedocles, that ardent soul / Leapt into Etna and was roasted whole," gleefully quoted in Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* (p60).

Along with Empedocles, the Gymnosophists and Hercules, who burned himself to escape the agony caused from the poisoned cloak given him by wife Deianeira – a present with no future for its recipient – were models for our second firestarter. Homage here to Stephen King's eponymous novel with its prefatory advice to read Fort on 'pyrokinesis' – Peregrinus Proteus.

His tabloid tale is told by eyewitness Lucian. As advertised in conditions of maximum publicity, Peregrinus burned himself to death as postlude to the Olympic Games of AD 165 – something like that would much enliven our modern ones, though not sure how you'd decide the winner. This self-carbonisation (Lucian's term) crowned an extraordinary career of rascality, retailed with relish by his Greek-Syrian necrographer.

Caught in adultery as a teenager in Armenia, he took a sound thrashing until escape by jumping from the roof, his bum stuffed with a radish (the traditional punishment for fucking other men's wives: the Greeks, of course, had a word for it – *raphanismos*). Next – nothing if not versatile – he raped a comely youth, evading arrest by a handsome pay-off to the buggaree's parents. After this escapade, he strangled his sexagenarian father "for living too long," perhaps humming a pre-Rolling Stones 'What A Drag It Is Getting Old', also evoking the supposed old Roman tradition of hurling 60-year-olds into the Tiber.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

Decamping to Palestine, Peregrinus fell in with the local Christians – Lucian's ridicule of their belief in immortality earning him abuse from his Byzantine commentators and a place on the Vatican's Index of Forbidden Books – a gullible lot who allowed him to become their leader and spokesman, also allowing him to explain their books (sc. The Bible) and even compose some new ones which I speculate could include some of the many apocryphal Gospels that still survive; cf. Gilbert Bagnani, 'Peregrinus Proteus and the Christians,' *Historia* 4, 1955, pp107-12. When he was finally arrested, these Galilæans brought material and spiritual comfort to his cell – Lucian would have appreciated the modern quip that no Roman ever went to the Colosseum for the hymn-singing.

Freed from gaol by a sympathetic governor, Peregrinus – his pockets jingling with Christian alms – absquatulated to Egypt to study headline-grabbing gimmicks with the Cynic Agathoboulos. Modelled on the antics of tub-dwelling (actually, a winecask) Diogenes, these included waving his cock to all-comers (risibly rendered in the Loeb translation as "erecting his yard"). After moving on to Italy, where he specialised in insulting the tolerant emperor Antoninus Pius, and Greece where he both urged anti-Roman uprisings (one actually did happen) and fell foul of local mega-millionaire Herodes Atticus for abusing his corruption of the spectators with his Olympia aqueduct – simultaneously quaffing its water, he ran out of shock-and-awe tactics, so – changing his name to the appropriate for his plan one of Phœnix (cf. Christopher Fry's plays *A Phœnix Too Frequent* and *The Lady's Not For Burning*) – he leapt into the flames, his roasting flesh – Lucian mockingly subjoins – stinking out even the gods on Mount Olympus.

Lucian adds a cautionary note of which Fort would approve, even coming from one of his 'thrice-accursed Greeks', saying that, if telling this story to an ignorant mob rather than his sophisticated readers, he would embroider it with a concomitant earthquake, mysterious subterranean bellowings, and a vulture soaring from the flames to heaven (as supposedly happened at the funerals of Romulus and Julius Cæsar).

"A barrier to rational thinking, in anything like a final sense, is continuity, because of which only fictitiously can anything be picked out of a nexus of all things phenomenal, to think about. So, it is not mysterious that philosophy, with its false or fictitious, differences, and therefore false, or fictitious, problems, is as much baffled as it was several thousand years ago" – Fort, *Books*, p605.

MATT PATTINSON

SCIENCE

SIGNAL OR NOISE?

Ther Internet went wild with speculation about alien contact when a "strong signal" was picked up from star HD164595 this August, but **DAVID HAMBLING** urges caution.

This summer, the Russian RATAN-600 radio telescope picked up an anomalous signal while searching for signs of extraterrestrial intelligence, sending ripples of excitement through the Internet. Could this be First Contact with an alien civilisation at last? Previous incidents show how other causes need to be ruled out first.

In 1899, Nikola Tesla was working on a sensitive instrument for detecting radio waves to track thunderstorms by their electrical signatures. He started picking up something that seemed more like a deliberate signal than noise: first one beep, then two, then three. He considered whether these pulses might be produced by solar activity, or the Aurora Borealis, or atmospheric disturbances, but there was "such a clear suggestion of number and order" that they looked like an intelligent signal. There were no other radio transmitters in the US, and European transmitters were too weak, so the signal must have come from somewhere else.

In 1901 Tesla told the press that the signals were extra-terrestrial. He did not identify a source, but all the talk was of Mars – HG Wells's bestselling Martian invasion story *The War of The Worlds* had been published in 1897 – and the assumption was that Tesla was receiving communications from the red planet.

A more likely explanation for Tesla's signals emerged in the 1950s. Two American physicists, brothers Kenneth and James Corum, found that one of Jupiter's moons, Io, sometimes emits regular pulses as it passes through a belt of plasma. The regular variations occur as it passes through areas of different magnetic field strength. In 1996 they used a replica of Tesla's receiver to pick up the same repeating pulses, which were coming from Io.

Since then, attempt to pick up radio signals from outer space have been confounded by the increasing number of radio sources on Earth – and above it. The first organised search for intelligent signals was Project Ozma, in April and May 1960. It was headed by astronomer Frank Drake, originator of the Drake equation predicting the number of alien civilisations in the galaxy. Ozma had use of the giant National Radio Astronomy telescope for six hours a day, and pointed it at Tau Ceti.

When Drake moved the receiver to point at Epsilon Eridani, he immediately saw a signal at 1420 MHz. This is considered the most likely wavelength for interstellar communication, as it is produced by hydrogen and is basic to radio astronomy. The frequency is prohibited for radio broadcasters for this reason.

"Can it really be this easy?" Drake asked colleagues. Sadly, it was not. Further investigation showed the signal was coming from an aircraft, but one flying at an extraordinary altitude of around 80,000ft (24,400m). Ozma had accidentally stumbled on the still-classified U-2 spyplane. Drake did not publish the results.

In 1967, astrophysicist Jocelyn Bell was working at the Cavendish Laboratory looking for scintillation produced by giant star-like objects that had recently been discovered and christened quasars. (Quasars are now believed to be galaxies collapsing into black holes, and Jocelyn Bell is now Dame Jocelyn Burnell.) Bell found a distinctive pulsing signal appearing every 1.3 seconds. She confirmed with a second telescope that it was coming from a fixed point in the sky rather than from the ground. There was no ready explanation for the anomaly; extraterrestrials were seen as highly unlikely, and not the sort of thing that would be received well in a scientific paper.

"Here was I trying to get a Ph.D. out of a new technique, and some silly lot of little green men had to choose my aerial and my frequency to communicate with us," Bell joked.

The signal was labelled LGM (for Little Green Men). Bell was relieved to find similar signals emanating from other parts of the sky in the following months. This looked more like a natural phenomenon, as it seemed unlikely that several aliens were all sending similar signals specifically to Earth. Bell published a paper in 1968, and the same year the explanation was found: neutron stars, known as pulsars, which rotate extremely rapidly – every 1.3 seconds – sweeping round a beam of radio waves like a lighthouse.

Bell did not find aliens, but she did discover a new class of stellar objects. Other results have been decidedly less stellar. Bursts of radio energy lasting a few milliseconds were observed at the Parkes Observatory in New South Wales in Australia from 1998 onwards. Nicknamed perytons after a fabulous beast invented by Borges, these were traced to a terrestrial rather than celestial origin but could not be located. Theories ranged from exotic types of lightning to gamma-ray bursts produced by cosmic rays in the atmosphere. In 2015 perytons were found to be caused by microwave ovens at the observatory being opened too early. It takes the magnetron generating microwaves a few milliseconds to cut out, hence the brief burst.

While there have been many false positives from other sources, researchers still have reason to hope. In 1977, astronomer Jerry Ehman found a strong signal in 1420 MHz radio waves picked up on 15 August by Ohio State University's Big Ear telescope from the direction of Sagittarius. The signal lasted for 72 seconds, and varied from five to 20 times as strong as the radio background noise. Ehman's immediate reaction was to write "Wow!" in the margin of the computer printout, and this has been known as the Wow! signal ever since.

The Wow! signal remains unexplained. Ehman is keeping an open mind; aliens are a possibility but he would like more signals before drawing conclusions. Multiple searches of the same area have failed to turn up any further signals. In 2016 astronomer Professor Antonio Paris of St Petersburg, Florida, suggested that the signal might have come from comets. Comets have not yet been proven to emit such signals, but the possibility is being investigated. The signal detected by RATAN-600 may have come from 94 light years away as it first appeared; the researchers caution that a terrestrial source may be more likely. We may be disappointed again, but the search continues.

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CHEATING THE REAPER

WE CELEBRATE THE REMARKABLE LONGEVITY OF THE LATEST BATCH OF SUPER-CENTENARIANS

Another generation of super-centenarians have been in the news since our last round-up [**FT330:14-15**]. The oldest person whose age is beyond doubt is still the Frenchwoman Jeanne Calment, who died in 1997 aged 122 years and 164 days. She enjoyed a kilo (2.2lb) of chocolate every week, and also believed keys to a long life included olive oil, port and cigarettes – although she gave up smoking at the age of 120. "I know that I will die laughing," she told friends. "I have only one wrinkle, and I'm sitting on it."

Super-centenarians are constantly asked for the "secret' of their longevity, and their answers are frequently bizarre. Weird diets often feature, such as Emma Morano's raw eggs (see below). Edith Dobson (100) of Bexhill said the key was a crisp sandwich every day, while Constance Melloy of Grimsby said her secret was Marmite on toast, which she had eaten almost every day since 1918.

Antonio Docampo Garcia, who died in Vigo, northwest Spain, in February 2016 aged 107, attributed his longevity to drinking four bottles of red wine every day – two bottles with lunch, two with dinner – but no water. He owned his own vineyard and founded the wine company Bodegas Docampo. Betty Shimeld (103), a former taxi driver of Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, attributed her great age to a daily glass of whisky since the 1940s, while Dorothy Lashly (100) of Cheltenham drank a can of beer every day before lunch for 84 years. Dorothy Howe (100) of Saltdean, East Sussex, said a whisky and 15 cigarettes a day had helped her reach her century – which she celebrated with two large glasses of Scotch. In 84 years, she had consumed almost half a million ciggies. Batuli Lamichhane, a 112-year-old Nepali woman, smokes 30 a day, and has been puffing away for the last 95 years, or so she claimed in January this year. Frank Earley (100) thanked "smoking" for a long life – as a cigarette case saved him from a bullet in World War II.

Gertrude 'Topsy' Hindley (103) of Sidmouth, Devon, said her secret was that she had never had a television, but listened to local radio instead. "She's never really been aware of what's going on in the world," said her nephew. "I think that's a reason why she has lived so long." Last year, Jessie Gallan (109) of Aberdeen said: "My secret of a long life has been staying away from men. They're just more trouble than they're worth. I also made sure I got plenty of exercise. I eat a nice bowl of porridge every morning and never married. I worked hard and seldom would I take a holiday." When Augusta Holtz (114) was asked the secret of old age, she gave the incontrovertible reply: "Having birthdays". Twins Pieter and Paulus Langerock (102), the world's oldest living twin brothers, share a room in a nursing home just outside the Belgian town of Ghent. Paulus gave some sage (if rather dull) advice: "Don't waste your time fooling around, don't eat too much and don't run after women." George Higgs (109) of Leicester has it about right: "The secret of a long life is not to worry about anything. Just get on with it."

St Louis Post Dispatch, 28 Feb 1986; D.Telegraph, 13 Aug 2012, 11 Nov 2013, 30 May 2015; Sun, 5 May 2013, 14 Feb 2014, 20 July 2015; D.Mail, 16 Jan 2015; <i> 13 Aug 2015; Sunday Mirror, Sunday Telegraph, 3 Jan; NY Post, 26 Jan; Irish Independent, 6 Feb; Sun on Sunday, 21 Feb; Sunday People, 17 July 2016.

THE LEAGUE TABLE

Those marked with an asterisk have had their longevity claims accepted by the Gerontology Research Group in Los Angeles and *Guinness World Records*. The minimum requirement is official documentation from before the claimant turns 20.

MBAH GOTHO, 145+

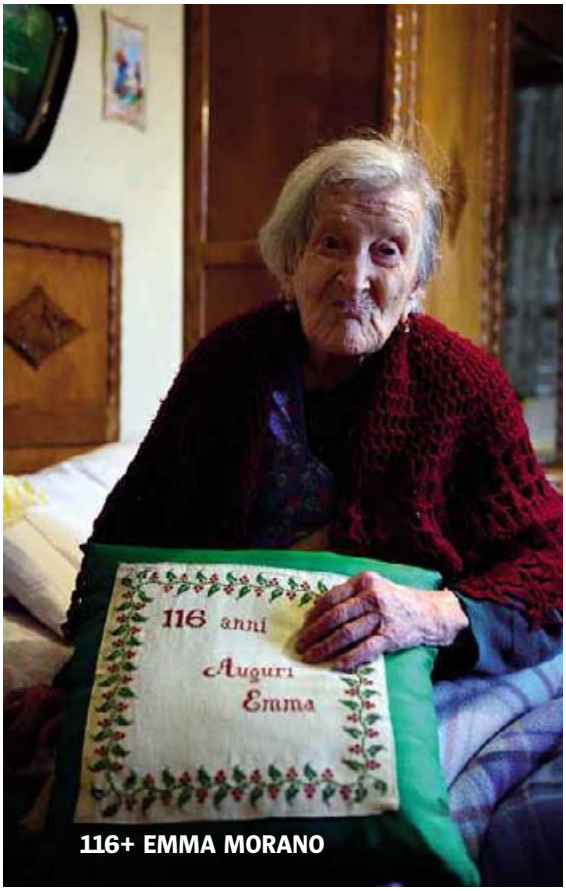
An Indonesian man who claims to be the oldest person in the world by some margin, said: "What I want is to die". Mbah Gotho (or Sodimejo) from Sragen in central Java was born on 31 December 1870, according to his 2014 identity card. Now officials at the local record office claim they can confirm that remarkable date as genuine – though he will not enter the record books without independent verification. Gotho has outlived all 10 of his siblings, four wives, and even his children. His nearest living relatives are grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. One of his grandsons said his grandfather has been preparing for his death ever since 1992. He has even bought a burial site close to the graves of his children. He now spends most of his time sitting and listening to the radio because his eyesight is too poor to watch television. He has had to be spoon-fed and bathed since June 2016, as he has become increasingly frail. When asked for his secret of longevity he said: "The recipe is just patience." Others without verifiable records who have purportedly lived even longer include "171-year-old" James Olofintuyi, a Yoruba chief in Ekiti state, southwest Nigeria, and "163-year-old" Dhaqabo Ebba, an Oromo elder from Ethiopia, who died on 10 May 2015.

145+ MBAH GOTHO

DASRIL ROSZANDI / NURPHOTO

TANZILYA BISEMBEEVA, 120+

This woman has lived in the village of Islamgazy in Russia's Krasnoyarsk region all her life, which allegedly began on 14 March 1896. "My mother has lived from Rasputin to Putin," said her son, Shintas Bisembeev. "She worked for more than 60 years in the fields and on plantations." She got married before World War II, but her husband was called to the war front and never returned. Their first-born died in infancy. Soon after the war, she married an elderly Kazakh man and in 1949, aged 53, gave birth to a son, followed by two more. According to Kazakh tradition, she lives with the family of her youngest son. Her daughter-in-law takes care of her. Her sons have retired and all live nearby. When asked about their mother's longevity secret, they said: "She is very kind, always looks at life positively, and sees only the good in people." She did not visit a doctor until she turned 100. She no longer goes out, but take cares of herself without assistance. She has 10 grandchildren, 24 great-grandchildren and two great-great grandchildren. According to the *Russian Book of Records*, she is now the second person in the world (after Jeanne Calment) to live to 120.



116+ EMMA MORANO

TRINIDAD ALVAREZ LIRA, 117 YRS+?

This Mexican woman had been waiting for years to obtain proof that she had been born in 1898 so she could claim all the government old age benefits to which she was entitled. The Mexico City department of social development finally granted her a birth certificate, but she was unable to cash a single cheque before she died of a heart attack on 29 June 2016.

ANDREW HATCH, 117 YRS, 103 DAYS

Hatch died in Oakland, California, on 18 January 2016. His family said he was born in Louisiana on 7 October 1898, in a time and place when birth certificates were rare for poor black children. Lack of this document kept him from being officially recognised as the world's oldest person, though he had for years had driver's licenses and other official documents with his age on them. His family moved from Louisiana to Houston, Texas, when he was a child. He travelled the world in the merchant marine as a young man, and was jailed in his early 20s in Texas for what he said was the "reckless eyeballing" of a pretty white woman. He escaped and lived for several years in Mexico, where he learned Spanish. He had lived in Oakland since 1933. Family members said he remained fiercely independent well past 110, living on his own in a senior apartment complex until 2014.

117+ ANDREW HATCH

117+? TRINIDAD ALVEREZ LIRA

*SUSANNAH MUSHATT JONES, 116YRS, 311 days

Thought to be the last living American born in the 19th century [**FT330:15**], Mrs Jones admitted last year to eating four strips of bacon with scrambled egg and grits every day. Her hair, long since turned white, had turned brown again. She was born in Alabama on 6 July 1899. Her parents were African-American sharecroppers; her grandmother, an ex-slave, allegedly lived to be 117. In 1928 Susannah married Henry Jones, but they were divorced in 1933. There were no children, but she had 100 nieces and nephews. She died in Brooklyn, New York, on 12 May 2016, officially the oldest person in the world, according to the Gerontology Research Group.

*EMMA MORANO, 116+

On the death of Susannah Jones, her longevity title passed to Emma Morano, born in Piedmont, Italy, on 29 November 1899. She left a violent husband in 1938, shortly after the death of her only child at the age if seven months. She never married again. She has eaten two (or three) raw eggs every day since she was 20, when a doctor recommended them to counter anæmia. Another secret of her longevity, she says, is eating small quantities of raw minced meat, and having only milk for supper. She also enjoys a regular glass of grappa. She lives in a small flat in Verbania on the shores of Lake Maggiore, and might be the very last person on Earth born in the 19th century – well, maybe.

*GLADYS HOOPER, 113 YRS, 172 DAYS

Gladys Hermiston-Hooper became the UK's oldest person on the death of Ethel Lang, 114, on 15 January 2015. She died in a nursing home in Ryde, Isle of Wight, on 9 July 2016. Born Gladys Nash in Dulwich, south-east London, on 18 January 1903 – the oldest of six siblings all of whom predeceased her – she became a concert pianist before starting Autodrive, one of the first car hire businesses in London, in the 1920s. She later ran Kingscliff House School, now part of Brighton College. Besides being born the same year as the Wright brothers' first powered flight, she was good friends at college with the celebrated aviatrix Amy Johnson. She was widowed in 1977 with the death of her husband Leslie, who had been a pilot in both

OLIVIER MORIN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

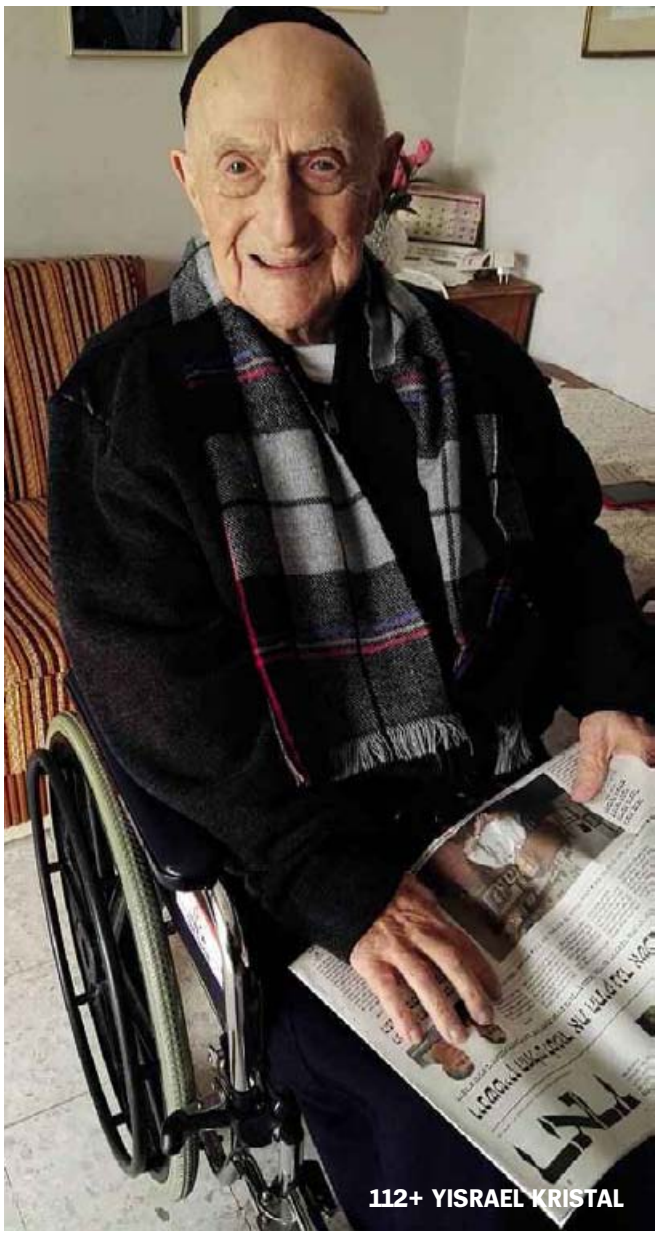
world wars. Her son Derek, 84, was also a pilot. In October 2015 she became the oldest person in the world (112) to have a hip operation. She never smoked, but enjoyed the occasional sherry. Discussing her health recently, she observed that she must be doing well as she still had her own teeth. "It's true," said Derek, "even if she does have only about four left." The oldest of her six great-grandchildren is 26. On her death, Bessie Camm, 112, from Rotherham, South Yorkshire, became the UK's oldest citizen.

*YASUTARO KOIDE, 112 YRS, 312 DAYS

Koide became officially the world's oldest man in August 2015, following the death of Sakari Momoi of Tokyo a month earlier, aged 112. Koide was born in Nagoya, Japan, on 13 March 1903 and worked as a tailor. His secret of longevity was "not to smoke, drink or overdo it" – and to live with joy. He still had his own teeth and read without glasses. The father of seven died in Nagoya of heart failure and pneumonia on 19 January 2016, whereupon the title of oldest man in Japan passed to Masamitsu Yoshida, born in Tokyo on 30 May 1904.

*YISRAEL KRISTAL, 112+

On 11 March 2016, following the death of Yasutaro Koide, *Guinness World Records* declared this Holocaust survivor the world's oldest man, after documents confirming his age were found in Poland. Yisrael Kristal was born in Maleniec, near Zarnów in Poland, on 15 September 1903, and remembers, aged 11, throwing sweets at the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Josef when he rode through his town. His mother died in 1910; his father was drafted into the Imperial Russian Army in 1914 and died in action. As a 17-year-old orphan, Yisrael moved to Łódz´, where he found work in a sweet factory and became a master confectioner. He married in 1928 and had two children. In 1940 the Nazis moved him and his family to the Jewish ghetto, where his children died. In August 1944 he and his wife were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp during the liquidation of the ghetto. His wife was murdered, but he was liberated by the Red Army in 1945, when he weighed just 37kg (5 stone, 12lb). In 1950 he emigrated to Israel with his second wife and son and settled in Haifa, where the couple had a daughter. He built up another sweet business and now has nine grandchildren and many great-grandchildren. His family prefers not to state his exact number of descendants for fear of the evil eye. "I don't know the secret for long life," he said. "I believe that everything is determined from above and we shall never know the reasons why."



112+ YISRAEL KRISTAL

SHULA KOPERSHTOUK / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

111+ NAZAR SINGH

SHAMMI MEHRA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

NAZAR SINGH, 111 YRS, 12 DAYS

Nazar Singh of Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, was born in the Punjab on 8 June 1904, the son of a farmer, and travelled to England in 1965. He worked in a West Midlands foundry for almost 25 years, and was possibly Europe's oldest man (though he had no birth certificate). He died on 20 June 2015, while visiting his two eldest sons in India. He said the secret to his long life was a strong family, good food, plenty of sleep, and happiness. He enjoyed drinking milk and almond oil, regularly ate fruit and had a drop of whisky every night. He met Narajan Kaur in 1932 and they wed in an arranged marriage. They had six sons and three daughters, 34 grandchildren and 63 great-grandchildren.

SOURCES

Bisembeeva: Sputniknews.com, Metro, 12 May 2016. **Ebba:** BBC News, 6 Sept 2013. **Gotho:** Sunday Telegraph, 28 Aug 2016. **Hatch:** [AP] Contra Costa Times, 19 Jan 2016. **Hooper:** D.Telegraph, 17 Oct 2015, 18 Jan + 27 Aug 2016; BBC News, 9 July; D.Mail, 19+22 Jan 2015, 18 Jan, 11 July 2016. **Jones:** New York Magazine, 14 Dec 2015; NY Daily News, BBC News, 13 May; Dundee Courier & Advertiser, 14 May 2016. **Koide:** <i> 22 Aug 2015; D.Express, 23 Jan 2016. **Kristal**: D.Mail, Guardian, 12 Mar 2016. **Lira:** Guardian online, 30 June 2016. **Morano:** D.Telegraph, Guardian, 14 May 2016. **Singh:** D.Mail online, 22 June 2015.

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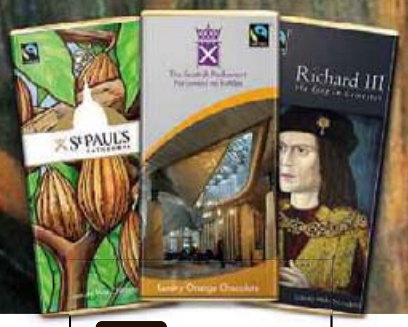
We asked Tate Modern to switch to a Fairtrade tourist bar and they said it does not *'fit our current plans'*



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WHAT WERE THE ANCIENTS UP TO ?

NECROLOG

This time, we say goodbye to the behavioural psychologist who learnt how to communicate with dolphins and wave off the clown priest of the Church of England

LOUIS HERMAN

ALAN LEVENSON / THE LIFE IMAGES COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES

In 1966 Louis Herman (who had a doctorate in psychology from the City College of New York) began teaching experimental psychology at the University of Hawaii, where the bulk of research was done on rats and rhesus monkeys. A student suggested he should focus instead on dolphins, which had been attracting great interest following the success of neuroscientist John Lilly's *Man and Dolphin* (1961). Herman was intrigued by Lilly's suggestion that dolphins might communicate using their own language. In 1969 he received funding to open Kewalo Basin Marine Mammal Laboratory in Honolulu. While the cognitive abilities of apes were well understood, Herman was among the first to demonstrate that species more distantly related to humans were also capable of mastering complex tasks. (Hardly surprising, as dolphins have possessed brains larger and more complex than human ones for more than 25 million years.) To one bottlenose dolphin, Kea, he taught an acoustic language made up of computer-generated sounds. Another, named Puka, was tested for the ability to respond to visual signals such as hand gestures. By 1977 Kea had mastered 12 words and could perform tasks on demand such as "Fetch the ball" and "Touch the ring".

On 29 May 1977, two caretakers at the lab who had been fired for incompetence released Kea and Puka into Yokohama Bay, believing they were liberating them from prison – but the dolphins had never learnt to fend for themselves and are unlikely to have survived. The caretakers were convicted of grand larceny and Herman resumed his research with two female bottlenose dolphins, Phœnix and Akeakamai (Ake). At two years old, both were far younger than Puka and Kea had been when Herman took charge of them. Phœnix was taught the acoustic system, while Ake learnt a 'dolphinised' version of American Sign Language.

Herman ultimately demonstrated that dolphins, like bonobos, can process two of the fundamental components of human language: the meaning of words represented by sound or symbol, and the order that governs how they relate in an English sentence grammatically. Research suggested that they could understand the abstract meanings of the words, could discriminate left from right and, unlike chimps, could understand when humans gesture by pointing. They were found to use sharp clicking sounds for echo-location to detect the distance, shape, size and solidity of an object. Like people, the research found, dolphins can be short-tempered when they are wrong and relish being right (especially when rewarded with a helping of silver smelt). "Our goal is to establish two-way communication, admittedly on a very elementary level," Herman told *People* magazine. "We're not going to talk philosophy."

Phœnix and Ake died from cancer in 2004, and pressure from animal rights groups ended funding for Herman's research. *Louis Marvin Herman, behavioural psychologist, born Jamaica, Queens, NY 16 April 1930; died Honolulu 3 Aug 2016, aged 86.*

• Researchers at the Karadag Nature Reserve, in Feodosia, Ukraine, have recently recorded two Black Sea bottlenose dolphins, Yasha and Yana, talking to each other in a pool. They found that each dolphin would listen to a sentence of pulses without interruption, before replying. They alter the volume and frequency of pulsed clicks to form individual 'words', which they string together into sentences in much the same way that we do. It was already known that dolphins use more than 1,000 different types of whistle depending on social context, but it was unclear until now if they could communicate directly with each other, one to one.

In 2007 Australian scientists identified specific whistles, which were interpreted to mean "I'm here, where is everyone?" "Hurry up!" and "There's food over here". Dolphins are also thought to have developed a type of sign language in which they communicate with their flippers. In early 2016, a group of scientists in Florida showed that the communication between dolphins increases when they are undertaking a difficult task – in one case removing the lid from a canister – as if they were discussing the best solution. The new research was published in the journal *Mathematics and Physics*. (*D.Telegraph, 12 Sept 2016*.)

JOHN ANGERSON / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

THE REVEREND ROLY BAIN

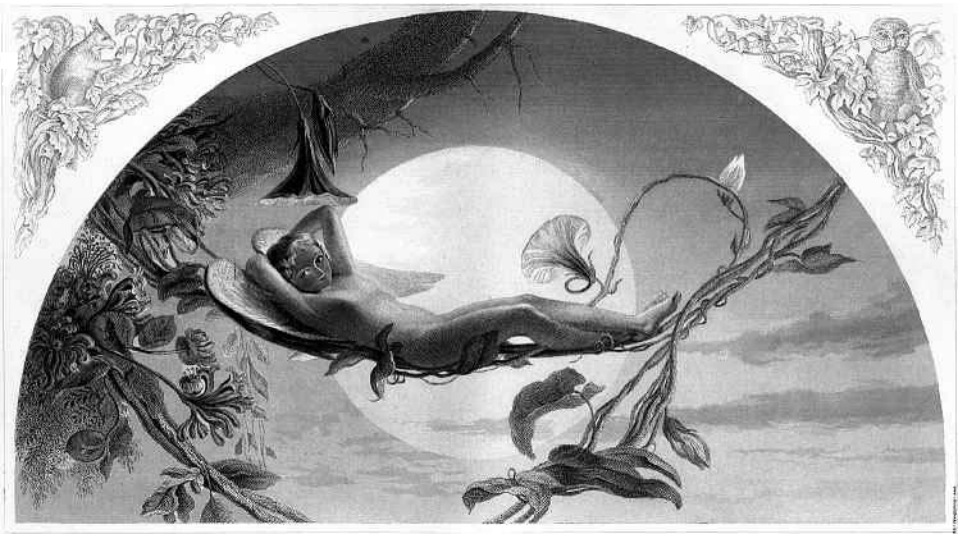
Ordained in 1978, Bain was an itinerant priest-clown who performed in churches, hospitals, schools, prisons and open-air events around the country. Dressed in an outsized dog collar and size 18 boots, he exported his unusual preaching method through visits to America, Europe and Australia, at one time travelling more than 38,000 miles (61,000km) a year. Having mastered juggling, high-wire balancing and the art of the pratfall, he devised his own make-up for his performances as "Holy Roly": heavily rouged cheeks and a red nose, with a black cross on either side of the face. He would proceed down the church aisle on a unicycle and conduct choirs with a pink feather duster. He blew bubbles during prayers to represent God's promises and embellished the Bible message with a fondness for wordplay. The service would often culminate in Bain attempting to deliver a sermon while balanced on a slack rope – an elastic cable fixed between two pillars topped with crosses. "It's a metaphor of the wobbliness of faith," he explained. "It's ridiculous to try and get on and stay on the rope, yet it's a wonderful thing."

Bain performed as an auguste, the simpleton who in clown tradition always wins against authority. Though his humour could be subversive – he claimed to have thrown custard pies at 10 bishops – he enjoyed broad support from the Church. Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, was a patron of the Faith and Foolishness Trust that funded Bain's ministry. Bain saw the clown's work as part of a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages. His inspiration lay in the holy fools who would expose the weaknesses of earthly authorities, especially in the New Year celebration of the Feast of Fools, at which the lower clergy briefly assumed power over their superiors.

Bain was the author of *Clowning Glory* (1995), a how-to guide for aspiring performers written with fellow Anglican Patrick Forbes, and *Playing the Fool* (2001), a memoir. In 1994 he was named Clown of the Year by Clowns International.

For more clowns in church see pp4-5 of this issue; and for their creepier cousins, turn to pp22-23.

David Roualeyn Findlater Bain (Revd. Roly Bain), priest and clown, born 18 Jan 1954; died 11 Aug 2016, aged 62.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

FAIRY ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND

Fairies have been floating around for centuries. But here's a teaser: where was the last place in Europe that fairies were believed in by a significant portion of the community? Ireland? Portugal? Bognor Regis?

This summer, to try and get a handle on the question, I tinkered around with a fairy scale that ranges from 1 to 3 – a shameless borrowing from ufology. The first level: people see, hear, or (in one memorable case from Yorkshire) smell fairies, but there is no interaction. The second level: there is light interaction between fairies and humans with no long-lasting effects. For example, fairies plait your horse's mane, or perhaps they pixy-lead you in the forest. The third level: strong interaction with fairies, with serious consequences. This might include marrying a fairy (and/or having kids); using a fairy as a familiar to gain magic powers; or fairies killing or changing human neighbours who annoyed or intrigued them.

> WE HAVE DESCRIPTIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN BEING FAIRY-LED WHILE OUT BERRY-PICKING

How do different regions score? Well, there are very few parts of Western Europe where, in the last 50 years, a substantial part of the population would allow fairies to score even one. People claim to see fairies, there is no question, but most traditional rural communities would write witnesses off as eccentrics. True, there are some exceptions: for instance, there are parishes in Ireland and Scotland where perhaps there is still a grudging shared respect for the 'good folk', buoyed along by occasional sightings. Some parts of rural France (Brittany?) and some parts of Scandinavia figure here, too. Elfin sabotage of road-making equipment in Iceland might even bring us up to level two. If I had to choose, though, the region where traditional European fairy beliefs had survived best I would, paradoxically, cross the Atlantic.

In Newfoundland, on the east coast of Canada, fairy beliefs have been carefully tracked by folklorists since the 1960s, and one of our best modern fairy books, *Strange Terrain* by Barbara Rieti, was published in 1991 about the Newfie fey. What is remarkable for someone used to the rather anæmic post-war fairy material from Western Europe is how lively fairy belief was in this part of Canada until recent times. We have a report, for example, of a baby being changed in Newfoundland in 1968 – the year of the Prague rising and riots in Paris. We have descriptions from the late 1980s of men and women being fairy-led in the woods when out berry-picking. We have memories from the same date of fairies whipping children: Rieti met an elderly woman who still carried a scar! Often immigrant communities are more conservative than the lands they came from: this was certainly the case with fairy beliefs of Newfoundland.

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

the UFO files

FORTEAN TIMES presents our monthly section featuring regular sighting reports, reviews of classic cases, entries on major ufological topics and hands-on advice for UFO investigators. **The UFO Files** will benefit from your input, so don't hesitate to submit your suggestions and questions.

To contact **The UFO Files**, email: **nufon@btinternet.com**

FLYING SORCERY

PETER BROOKESMITH PRESENTS HIS REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

AMONG THE STARS

First the bad news: Errol Bruce Knapp (see last column, **FT345:30**) passed away on 11 August. He had gone into hospital in late June with heart problems and pneumonia. He had two open-heart surgeries, then a post-operative stroke. The pneumonia got him in the end, as it does, and we're told he died peacefully. His brother Wesley has left more details of his last days and a brief biography at http://communityalternative.ca/book-of-memories/2684008/Knapp-Errol/obituary.php

I stumbled, so to speak, on Errol in 1996, in the course of researching the delightfully hokey Carp, Ontario, close-encounter case for *UFO: The Government Files* – for which he and Drew Williamson supplied far more information than I could use – and Errol signed me up for what was then MUFON Ontario's UFO UpDates email list. At some point, not long after, UpDates became Errol's personal project and eventually attracted most of ufology's good and great, as well as its small and very naughty, onto its roll. A significant number were experiencers. Much entertainment was to be had from the jousting between largely sceptical British and European posters and, on the whole, credulous Americans. Most of these exchanges were polite, if often trenchant. Eventually, the email list became redundant as a medium, and UFO Updates was reborn as a Facebook page, which still exists, albeit now apparently rudderless since its founder's demise.

UpDates was Errol's great achievement: he was not himself an original researcher or commentator, and did not pretend to be – he once told me that he'd considered (re) naming his list 'Educating Errol' as a sign of both his curiosity and his willingness to listen to all sides. That said, he was erratic in choosing those to whom he gave an audience and whom he did not: among others, he banned the highly eccentric Dr Richard Boylan as arbitrarily as he did the rather more sober Carol Rainey and Emma Woods, without ever really explaining why. The list has been archived as PDF files by the redoubtable Isaac Koi at www.afu.se/Downloads/Discussion%20Lists/

As noted before, I am more than grateful to Errol for his extremely generous help and hospitality when I stayed in Toronto with him and his then-partner Sue while researching my book about abductions. While there I learned about his time in the British Army – and that he'd been posted to the garrison just outside my hometown, where he claimed to have escorted the scarcely-unlovely Suna Portman (daughter of our local Lord Portman and *doyenne* of early 'swinging London'). Which could be called par for the course for a warrant officer's son who'd managed to marry his dad's colonel's daughter. Errol was born of a Greek mother in Alexandria (conceived out of wedlock, so that was something else we had in common). The spousal associate and I celebrated his life and his humour with Greek and Egyptian cuisine and appropriate vinous liquors, but with nary a flying saucer in the sky. He is missed. RIP.

JOHN THYS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Mr Juncker's alien overlords share his concerns about Brexit.

BREXIT, SCHMEXIT

As those who can stomach the public prints will already know, on 23 June the people of the UK voted (52% to 48%) to leave the European Union. This occasioned much wailing and gnashing of teeth, particularly among the *plus grands fromages* of the EU, who confirmed one's decades-old impression that they'd prefer democracy to go away and not come back. Not least among these was Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, who said in a speech on 28 June: "The British vote has clipped some of our many wings. But our flight goes on. We will not halt our journey into the future. New horizons await. And we are flying towards horizons that are those of Europe and of the entire planet. Make no mistake, those who are watching us from afar are concerned. I have met and listened to several leaders of other planets. They are very worried because they are wondering about the course the European Union will take. So we must reassure Europeans and those who are watching us from further away" (video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9pby3pyxuE).

Naturally the conspirasphere's collective hair fell out, or at least went all frizzy and white overnight, at this revelation. But which leaders of which planets? Stan X of the Sphere Alliance Data Collectors (read all about it at galacticconnection.com) tells us that Juncker had met leaders of the "inner Earth realm Agartha" and an "ambassador of a Sirian realm. And representatives of Lyra and Orion". So that's all right then. Less happily, blogger John de Nugent had a slightly different take: "Aliens, specifically reptilians, who want the earth back as a reptilian planet as it was in the dinosaur age, created the Illuminati (the Big Jews), who dangel [*sic*] money in front of the Little Jews, who in turn manipulate the animalized Americans." He also divines that "Juncker is obviously part-Jewish *by his features*" [emphasis added] which, by the de Nugent theory of human (d)evolution, makes him part-Neanderthal as well. For more, and much worse, do visit the site (www.johndenugent.com). And do ignore all those sceptical cover-up merchants who say this was just a slip of the Juncker tongue.

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES LOOKS AT MORE ANOMALOUS EVENTS REPORTED BY APOLLO ASTRONAUTS

SPACE ODDITIES 2

NASA

Last month (**FT345:31**) I looked at new NASA transcripts released to scotch claims that during the Apollo missions of the 1960s and 1970s astronauts had UFO contacts. But are there any more puzzling cases from the location where you might expect UFO sightings to be most common – above our atmosphere in the lonely depths of space? The answer is... perhaps.

The most studied case happened during the Gemini 4 mission – when astronauts came upon a UFO high above the Pacific Ocean. This was on 4 June 1965 while they were circling the Earth over the Hawaiian Islands. Only James McDivitt, of the two astronauts aboard, was awake and saw – then photographed – the strange-looking object described as "like a beer can (or pop can) with an arm sticking out".

McDivitt stuck to his belief that what he saw was unexplained, despite much analysis after his return to Earth. But there were problems: he had struggled to set camera exposures and take photographs through the tiny window as their small craft rolled in its planned motion, intended to cope with undiluted sunlight shining directly onto the window.

NASA released two images from the hundreds taken during the mission. They showed white blobs, but McDivitt said he knew right away that these were not the object he had photographed and, despite looking through all other exposures, he could not find his shots (though many photos were spoiled because of the sunlight glare). The photos NASA released were taken around the same time in the mission and are probably examples of a common source of UFO misperception during early space missions. This was an odd glow, caused by a bolt on the window through which the shot was taken, which then 'flares out' into a UFO-like appearance deriving from solar glare and limitations of 1960s camera technology.

However, McDivitt's sighting was believed genuine by many and has been intensively analysed. NASA never resolved the matter, but in a 1999 memoir McDivitt (who later flew on lunar mission Apollo 9) said he suspected it might have been something small and close to the capsule, as judging size and distance in space was difficult. The sighting was taken seriously by the 'Condon Report' – a team of scientists led by physicist Dr Edward Condon out of the University of Colorado in Boulder. This analysed the best data available during the late 1960s under a government grant and caused the US Air Force to drop its investigation into UFOs (Project Blue Book).

But the Condon study was not suggesting that all cases were resolved or that scientific interest in the subject be quashed. I was fortunate to visit Boulder along with Dr J Allen Hynek, who for over 20 years was scientific advisor to Blue Book. We debated cases such as this one with some of the scientists who had worked on the more puzzling data in the 'Condon' study. Some were sufficiently intrigued to join forces with Hynek and other UFO-friendly scientists to create a non-military research team. The team's work found its way into the celebrated Spielberg movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, on which Hynek was consultant; he even appears in the climactic scene, playing himself, as aliens land in front of stunned scientists.

The Colorado University scientists were impressed by the McDivitt sighting, and told me they regarded it as a serious 'challenge' to scientific understanding that nobody had yet answered. However, space journalist, UFO sceptic, and later NASA flight controller James Oberg took a different view: that the UFO was the booster rocket that had launched the Gemini crew into orbit. It was "up there" in a lower orbit but could still be seen at times catching the Sun. Oberg argued that McDivitt was tired, his eyes sore, and that his fellow astronaut had also admitted to seeing it during another part of the mission but had not immediately recognised what it was. McDivitt strongly rejected this theory and pointed out some sound reasons against it. He was actively plotting the location of the booster as part of an experiment he was conducting during the flight and so says he knew where it was at all times. Even so, determined to prove his colleague Oberg right, UFO critic Philip Klass sent a still taken from footage of the booster in orbit to McDivitt to ask if it was his UFO. The astronaut said: "I very quickly identified [it] as the second stage of the Titan rocket which launched us... I am sure that this is not a photograph of the object which I have described many times". He also clarified that the UFO was just that – something unidentified – and he was not claiming it was of alien origin.

During the NASA space shuttle programme of the 1980s and 1990s a number of 'sightings' were made during missions that do qualify for the description of UFOs. Some images generated wild theories, but better understanding of near-Earth space gained by NASA suggests some were a geophysical phenomenon occurring on the edge of the Earth's atmosphere but only seen from space. One of the strangest of the shuttle UFO stories occurred to mission STS 29 early on 13 March 1989, although nothing was made public during the flight. Two weeks later (in a British tabloid), there was a graphic headline – "Shuttle Crew Saw Aliens" – although this was a bit of a stretch as the story only describes them seeing an unresolved object in space.

By chance I was at an ITV studio doing a live phone-in on UFOs just as the story broke. Presenter Richard Madeley was shaking his head in amazement at the news, and I was trying to be objective about what had allegedly occurred aboard the US shuttle *Discovery*. Caution was wise, as it turned out. The alleged message picked up by a radio ham claimed that the crew had contact with a UFO that 'locked' onto the shuttle's controls and had used a code word – 'Fire' – to cover this up, as if such a term would be used for anything other than an astronaut's worst nightmare. The recording of this message did contain words spoken by a voice passably like the shuttle commander's, but voice analysis failed to establish it *was* him, and was most likely a hoax – as, of course, NASA and the shuttle crew said in no uncertain terms from the start. But the most obvious clue was that despite an alleged alien craft taking control of a NASA shuttle mid-flight, the mission went on unaffected for another five days. There seems little chance that this would have been the case if these events had ever happened.

The same shuttle – *Discovery* – became the centre of an even bigger UFO story on flight STS 48 in September 1991. Three days into this mission, on 15 September, they filmed on video some very intriguing images of white blobs of light seen against the backdrop of the Earth's atmosphere (above). These rapidly change direction and accelerate in motions that certainly look artificial. Unsurprisingly, many UFO researchers have speculated that this is important evidence, while NASA argued that the lights are really ice particles cast from the hull and that they move oddly when directed by the jets from the shuttle engines. The divide over this case is deep, but as a UFO sighting with undeniable provenance it is possibly the best in the history of NASA – even if it was just an Identified Flying Object.

There is also a fortean coda, as these two shuttle missions have an interesting link with space and aliens. STS 29, like many NASA flights, allowed the crew to pre-select music to wake them up in the morning from sleep. During the 'UFO' mission the crew of *Discovery* had chosen one day to use the theme music from the TV series *Star Trek*. Meanwhile, the commander of STS 48 was astronaut John Creighton. US Astronaut John Crichton (same pronunciation) was the protagonist in the cult TV series *Farscape*, about a shuttle pilot who gets lost during a NASA mission and meets aliens in deep space.

Now, by chance, we can tie the above coincidences together when, after a decade off screen, the TV show *Star Trek* returns to television in January 2017. This time the ship that will go out in search of new life and new civilisations will not be the *USS Enterprise*, as in several previous series: *Star Trek: Discovery* will be about the Federation craft the *USS Discovery*, named after a long line of spaceships that reach towards the stars. In real life, this run began with the NASA shuttle *Discovery* – which, as you can see, has a head start on the fictional craft in allegedly alien encounters.

DIABLERIES

THE DEVIL IN 3-D

In the second half of the 19th century, Paris was overtaken by a new sensation – stereoscopic cards in which the Devil and all his works were shown in astonishing, and often humourously satirical, detail. **BRIAN MAY** tells how he fell under their diabolical spell and with fellow fiends **DENIS PELLERIN & PAULA FLEMING** explores the technological and cultural background of these hellish creations.

The first time I encountered a Diablerie card was very early on a cold, frosty morning in the late 1960s, in that romantic marketplace of curious antiquities of all kinds – Portobello Road Market in West London. Being already obsessed with all things stereoscopic, I used to go there every Saturday morning to browse around the stalls looking for stereoscopes, stereo cards, Viewmaster reels, stereo cameras, and anything related to what seemed to me a lost art; for the magic of 3-D had lit a spark in me that was to last a lifetime.

One morning, one of the street traders showed me something I had never seen before – a magical group of yellow-rimmed stereo cards showing scenes of skeletons and demons. These were apparently engaged in various activities that made it seem as if life in Hell might be quite similar to that on Earth; the fact that most of the inhabitants were no more than bags of animated bones did not stand in the way of them having fun! Viewed in the stereoscope these scenes jumped into life in an astonishing way, and it was evident that they represented a whole new Universe created by skilful sculptors – dioramas populated with characters beautifully modelled in clay and photographed in 3-D. But the magic did not stop there. The photographs mounted in these cards were monochrome – made in the 1860s, long before colour photography. Viewed with light shining on the front, in the usual way, the images were seen just in various shades of sepia – a 'day-time' view. But their creators had built colouring – and more – into them by ingenious means. When the cards were held up to a bright light source, so that they became more illuminated from the back than the front, an amazing transformation happened. The pictures sprang into full colour, and the scene morphed from day into night: chandeliers, lanterns, and strings of incandescent torches burst into light against dark skies and murky waters, and hellish fires appeared from below. And to top it all, the eyes of the Devil and his skeletons and ghouls gleamed with an eerie red glow. No one viewing an original Diablerie tissue in a stereoscope for the first time can fail to be stunned by the ingenuity, the beauty, and the sheer madness of these small works of art. With all the advances we have made in the intervening 150 years, it's almost impossible to emulate what these artists created.

> LIFE IN HELL MIGHT BE QUITE SIMILIAR TO THAT ON EARTH

WHAT IS A DIABLERIE?

A Diablerie is a special kind of stereo card. But what is a stereo card? Stereo cards – 3-D views printed on paper – were first sold to the public in England and France around 1853, and became hugely popular throughout the 1850s. One of the pioneers in England was TR Williams (see *A Village Lost and Found*), who began creating works of art in the medium of stereo daguerreotypes around 1851, but soon moved over to marketing his stereo photographs as prints on early photographic paper, mounted on cards which fitted into the new 'standard' Brewster-style stereoscopes. The paper was coated with a layer of egg white (albumen) containing silver salts, in which a photographic positive image could be 'fixed' so that it became relatively stable and resistant to further exposure to light. Many of these 1850s prints have survived in perfect condition.

Going back a stage, the negatives to make these prints were made on glass plates by a different chemical process – Wet-Plate Collodion. The plate in the camera had to have been coated just seconds earlier with a sticky solution containing guncotton and silver salts, which was required still to be tacky at the time of exposure. The effort required to master this extremely tricky process was justified because

ABOVE: A rare original box of 12 Diableries published by Block c.1875.
FACING PAGE: 'L'Enfer': here we see some unfortunate damned souls, depicted as skeletons being boiled in a cauldron, while a winged and tailed Satan prods them with his trident. Created by Pierre Adolphe Hennetier some time before 1860, and typical of his early sculpture work, this picture is essentially a religious visualisation which conformed to what church-goers of the day were being told about life after death. Hennetier's great inspiration was to adapt this bas-relief style, often seen in churches depicting the Stations of the Cross, to show what the afterlife might look like. When the stereo card is illuminated from behind, the scene, coloured in fiery tones, and featuring glowing red eyes in the heads of the skeletons, becomes even more devilish.

ALL IMAGES FROM *DIABLERIES: STEREOSCOPIC ADVENTURES IN HELL*

the resulting plates were very sensitive – or 'fast' – making it possible to secure an image in exposures of just a few seconds. These negative plates were developed immediately on site, fixed, varnished and dried, and carefully stored until they were used to make the Albumen positive prints. The resulting stereo cards gave their Victorian audience an unprecedented view of the world, a kind of Cinema and TV of the day rolled into one, providing education, entertainment, and the sharing of ideas.

Many stereo cards were hand-tinted, using watercolours applied to the front surface of the prints, and for these cards the buyer would pay a higher price than for the monochrome versions. But the French developed something a little more ingenious. The 'French tissue' was introduced around 1858, modelled on a toy called a Polyorama Panoptique, offering a new way of enjoying stereo views. Instead of adding colours to the front of an albumen print, they turned it over and painted it on the back. They then made pinpricks and scratches in the paper in the exact positions of items to be highlighted, such as jewellery, lights, and lanterns, and even 'surprise' elements such as fireworks, etc. To the reverse of the prints they then applied blobs or tiny pieces of coloured gel to the prickings, so that, viewed from the front, with the light coming from behind, not only did the whole picture become coloured but the pricked lights and scratches would sparkle with a magical effect. To complete the manufacture of these tissue views, a sheet of tissue was then applied to the back of the prints to cover up the 'works'; then the whole was permanently sandwiched between two pieces of cardboard – the mount, or 'matte' – into which twin 'windows' were cut to allow viewing from the front and also illumination from the back.

The manual work involved in completing just one of these French tissues was enormous – and required considerable skill, especially because this precise work had to be applied twice, identically to the left and right images. These cards became very popular in the 1860s, and their makers became very creative, putting all sorts of 'surprises' into the backlit aspects, including moons, comets, trains, and... fires. Thus the French tissue was a perfect medium for the subjects of the Diableries, ready to bring them alive in all their devilish splendour. The Diableries included all of the 'surprise' elements seen in other tissues, but the great new feature was the eyes. The reds (and sometimes other colours) of the eyes of the Devil and all his skeleton henchmen, attendant goblins, and ghouls, set the Diableries apart with their unearthly glow, and were undoubtedly a contributory factor in their great success. But now let us take another step backwards, and ask 'what are we looking at in these stereo photographs, and how were the images originated?'

LEFT: A Diablerie card, illuminated from behind, in place in an 1860s French stereoscope. **BELOW:** Sculptor Louis Alfred Habert modelling one of his creations – Mademoiselle Satan.

DIABLERIES WERE ONCE PART OF THE MYSTERY PLAYS

MODELLING HELL

Nobody knows exactly why a young man called Pierre Adolphe Hennetier first decided in 1860 to make three tabletop tableaux depicting Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory. Coming from a background of small-scale sculpting of story-telling ornaments for churches, Hennetier had already paved the way for the genre by creating bas-reliefs depicting popular fables for the stereoscope. Now he created a vision of the afterlife, in his own unique style, which would have resonated with current notions of the day about life after death. But in populating his vision with the souls of men, embodied not as spirits or ghosts, but as living skeletons, he opened a door to a whole new world of devilments in 3-D. 'Devilments', incidentally, is probably the best translation of the word diableries into English – for the series is all about the activities of the Devil, in a loose and sometimes comical sense. There was actually very little humour in those first dioramas by Hennetier, but, under the auspices of a succession of publishers, the first of whom was a man called Lamiche, Hennetier was encouraged to spread his wings creatively. And very soon he was joined by another sculptor who came with great skills and a reputation as a fine artist – a man called Louis Alfred Habert. It seems that for a while these two men worked in friendly and spectacularly fruitful competition within a partnership; and later, when they split up, they continued to reference each other in their separate works.

There are, in all, over 180 bona fide Diableries, created between 1860 and the mid 1890s. At first sight, they are simply great fun, a parlour entertainment to share indoors on a rainy day or a frosty night. But these exquisitely crafted scenes were created for reasons far beyond mere amusement. Beneath the innocent façade of child-like stories lies an undercurrent of social comment, topical allusion, humour, and, in many cases, seditious satire – which was so dangerous in the repressive regime in which they were made, that it rendered their creators liable to be arrested and incarcerated.

THE CHANGING FACE OF THE DEVIL

Lamiche, Hennetier, and Habert did not invent Diableries; they simply used the new technique of the stereoscope to revive something that had been popular in one form or another for centuries, and had been freely used by many artists since the advent of lithography.

Originally, Diableries were part of the Mystery Plays that were enacted outside churches for the benefit of the illiterate masses in the Middle Ages. Mysteries were lengthy plays about the lives of saints, and to keep the audience's attention, the narration was occasionally interrupted by actors disguised as devils who would make as much noise as possible, and thus provide a much needed break – the equivalent of today's intervals. There were small Diableries, involving two devils, and big ones with up to four devils. It must be remembered that in Catholic France of the time, the Devil was a mighty weapon used by the Church, not only to keep people on the right path, but also to

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **An Infernal Concert**: Satan in a jolly mood, conducting his orchestra. Behind them is a panel of 'judges' seen against a distant moonscape: the middle one is covering his ears, and the other two seem to be screaming for mercy. No wonder Satan is enjoying himself so much! Hennetier is conveying a very different message here from the grim tones of 'Hell' and other early Diableries. We are clearly meant to join in the merriment – Hell is becoming a place which just might be fun. **Satan is Unwell**: An abrupt change of mood. Satan is sick and appears weak and haggard. The doctor who is taking his pulse has the body of a skeleton man, but the head of an ass. He has recommended a foot bath, as well as a clystère – the administration of a potent laxative per rectum. The skeleton to the left of the group of nurses is holding a rectal pump and the other one a rectal syringe. **Regattas in Satanville**: It's a glorious day for boating, and Habert's vivid imagination has conjured up a veritable horde of skeletons, all reminding us that Hell can be fun! Satan, for once, is not trying to win the race. Relaxed, with raised oars, in a boat with a spread-winged bat as a figurehead, he is being distracted by a pretty personal assistant. **Gateway to Hell**: Like Dante and Virgil before us, we are standing outside the gates of Hell. Everyone seems to be looking straight out of the picture at us, giving us a special welcome to eternal damnation. One new soul doffs his hat to us and shows us his pass, on which we can read the number '13' and 'valid for admission'. There are stalls selling things we might like to buy – the last chance before we depart this Earth. **The Infernal Library**: What kind of library is this that opens at midnight (according to the sign on the right of the door) and in which skulls sorted by sins are standing in rows where books should be? The artist has made it obvious that what 'readers' come to consult here is not bound volumes, but skulls. Satan has a a whole collection and keeps them all neatly categorised; in the Enfer of Hennetier and Habert, skeletons represent souls. So Satan is revelling in his collection of stolen essences of humans.

maintain its influence and power. Everything possible was done to hold simple souls in holy terror of the Evil One, and of the dreadful consequences of a sinful life. Representations of Hell, complete with horrible and vicious demons, were sculpted or painted both outside and inside churches, and sermons would often mention the torments inflicted upon the damned.

For centuries very little changed, and the Devil kept frightening old and young people alike. By the late 18th century, in Alain-René Lesage's *Le Diable Boiteux*, (The Devil Upon Crutches) and Jacques Cazotte's *Le Diable Amoureux* (The Devil in Love), demons started being seen more as fantastic figures capable of changing their appearance and sometimes willing to help humans than as sinister characters bent on the eternal damnation of the human race. Moreover, the Devil began to lose his traditional horn and tail, and was represented as a person who could mingle anywhere without being detected. The final blow to the traditional vision of the Evil One came with the advent of lithography (again at the end of the 18th century) and its use in illustrated magazines.

THE DEVILS OF PARIS

From the first quarter of the 19th century to the time the first stereoscopic Diableries were registered there were three main waves of Diables and Diableries. The first wave started timidly at the very beginning of 1825 with *Récréations Diabolico-Fantasmagoriques, Étrennes de 1825* by Guillaume Sulpice Chevallier (who had not yet adopted the pseudonym of Gavarni), a small book made up of folding pages, few copies of which have survived. They were soon followed by a series of extremely pornographic lithographs published anonymously in Brussels in 1830 by Eugène Modeste Edmond Le Poittevin (born Poidevin, 1806–70) under the title *Charges et Décharges Diaboliques* (Diabolical Charges and Discharges). In 1835, Achille Devéria (1800–57) also resorted to pornography to show the devious ways of the Devil in the 13 plates of his *Diabolico-Foutro-Manie*. Those publications must have had a limited impact, as they were bought only by well-off amateurs, but things changed when journalist Charles Philipon (1800–61) founded the satirical weekly papers *La Caricature* in 1830 and *Le Charivari* two years later.

Paul Gavarni published two double-page spreads, called *La Procession du Diable* and *Suite de la Procession du Diable in La Caricature* on 24 March and 7 April 1831. On 3 and 22 March 1833, Charles Ramelet (1805–51) made several vignettes of *Diableries Fantastiques* for *Le Charivari*. Around the same time, the illustrated review *L'Artiste* (1831–1904) published a lithograph by Edmond Le Poittevin showing the Devil carrying on his back the Musée Royal and laughing at artists running after him with their canvases under their arms. Victor Adam (1801–66) also made some lithographs showing in dozens of vignettes the works of the Devil or, as he called them in one of his plates his *Passe-Tems* [sic] or hobbies.

There are other examples of illustrations showing the Devil or his minions throughout the 1830s, but the Devil did not appear just inside the pages of illustrated magazines. He was also in books and on the stage. Author Frédéric Soulié published the *Mémoirs of the Devil* in 1837 and 1838, and the public could see him in a succession of vaudevilles, parodies, and comedies with such titles as *La Tentation de Maître Antoine* (1832), *Le Cheveu du Diable* (1833), *Le Souper du Diable* (1834), *Une Femme est un Diable* (1835), *Vive le Diable!* (1836), *L'Enfer en Goguette* (1837), and so on. People were by now gradually accepting the Devil as a person who could be mocked and ridiculed, rather than feared and dreaded.

Habert and Hennetier were a little too young to have known that first wave of 1830s devils, but they were young men – and Lamiche was in his prime – when the second wave came in the 1840s.

A Physiology of the Devil illustrated by Jean-Pierre Moynet (1819–76) was published in 1842; then came the famous *Le Diable à Paris*, in 1845 and 1846. This was a collection of short pieces on various aspects of Parisian life supposedly ordered by Satan himself through one of his demons, Flamèche. Satan, getting bored in Hell, had sent Flamèche to Paris and told him to report what he saw there. The pieces, dropped in a special drawer called *Le Tiroir du Diable* (The Devil's drawer), were written by some of the great authors of the time (Balzac, Alfred de Musset, George Sand, and Gérard de Nerval) and the illustrations were signed by Gavarni, Tony Johannot, Bertall, Nanteuil, and others. *Le Diable à Paris* was subsequently re-issued in 1853 and again in 1868.

At the same time, the Devil appeared in a variety of stage shows. There were so many of them in 1844 that they inspired two end-of-the year reviews: *Paris à tous les Diables* and *Diableries de l'année*. Once the Devil had become fashionable, there were *diables* and *diableries* everywhere, to some people's horror and to others' delight; they were on every wall and in every house. In the words of the song in the review *Paris à tous les Diables*, *Le Diable se donne à Paris / Et tout Paris se donne au diable* (The Devil gives himself to Paris / And everyone in Paris gives themselves to the Devil).

A similar situation occurred when the third wave of Diableries hit Paris in the mid-to-late 1850s. The Devil was still as popular as ever, and journalist Léo Lespès (1815–75) wrote a long and very witty piece about him called *The Devil, his Pumps and Works*, in the 31 August 1856 issue of *Le Figaro*. Towards the end of 1858, no fewer than five devil-related plays or operas could be seen on Parisian stages on the same day, which caught the attention of caricaturist Cham, who drew a man with his back to the readers, standing in front of a wall covered in posters advertising the performances. Underneath he wrote the following caption: "Wondering which Devil to turn to" – a variant of a common French expression which normally goes 'Wondering which Saint to turn to.' By the time the vignette was published, another Hell-related show had been added to the list – Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*, which had premiered on 21 October.

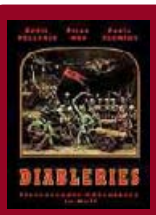
Everything was therefore ready by the end of 1858 for the creation and publishing of a new series of Diableries in a new medium – by Hennetier and Habert. The two sculptors, like

DIABLERIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Having been at the cutting edge of sterescopic viewing in the 19th century, the Diableries are now moving into other media. We've already had an award-winning short film (with music from Brian May & the Czech National Symphony Orchestra) entitled *One Night in Hell*, a devilish and spectacular animation that tells the story of one skeleton's journey into a stereoscopic Hell. Currently, work is underway on a feature-length version mixing stop-motion animation and live action, with an expected release date of 2019. Meanwhile, the Diableries application allows users to delve into the Diableries world by exploring Brian May's personal collection of Diableries stereo cards in amazing detail through initiative interaction. The app also includes the Diabl-O-Scope augmented reality feature where users are able to interact with "One Night in Hell" characters. The characters react to the user's play and can be recorded to be shared on social media. For all the latest news on Diableries-related projects, visit: www.onenightinhell.com/

A Bicycle Race in Hell: Satan evidently loves racing, as long as he wins. We see him in the lead on his unfairly massive unicycle, comfortably ahead of all the other competitors on their more common, and aptly named, boneshakers. This is another wonderfully creative composition, designed specifically to work only in 3-D – the race going from left to right in the foreground and right to left in the background. At the back of the field is a demon who is about to run over a fallen skeleton; another skeleton is trying to stop him by pulling his tail. Satan views all this with amusement, presumably because it makes him even more certain of winning the race. Bicycle races were a novelty in Habert's time, and though we don't know for sure when this 1873-registered diorama was actually made, the outfits and headgear of the two lady spectators are suggestive of the late 1860s or very early 1870s, which would make this one of the very first 'snapshots' of such a sporting event. The first bicycle race ever was held in France on 8th December 1867, between Paris and Versailles, a distance of just over 10 miles; but soon races were being organised everywhere in France and Great Britain alike. These are early days for cycles, and there are no chains or gears, so the rate at which the 'driven' wheel rotates is exactly the rate of pedalling. Hence, Satan is no fool choosing a huge wheel; in this case, the bigger the wheel, the faster the ride.

the general public, were familiar with the Devil and his ways, and had probably seen some of the many plays referring to him. Lamiche had had an even longer acquaintance with past Diableries, and had several grudges against the Emperor, whom he viewed as a fallen angel (he had been legally elected President of the French Republic and had then seized power by force but, unlike Satan's, his coup had succeeded). The Emperor was an evil creature who was responsible for his son's death, for the time he had spent in prison, and for the fact that he was being closely watched by the police. In Lamiche's mind, the President Prince had become the Dark Prince, and his newly founded empire was the Dark Empire. All that was now necessary was to convince his two artists to include hints and allusions to the current régime that would be plain enough to be easily understood by the public, but also subtle enough to escape the attention of the censors. FT



Adapted and extracted from *Diableries: Stereoscopic Adventures In Hell*, by Brian May, Denis Pellerin and Paula Fleming, published by LSC Publishing RRP £40. Includes OWL stereoscopic viewer.

Available from the London Stereoscopic Company website: www.londonstereo.com/books-diableries.html

A VISIT TO THE UNDERWORLD

MIKE DASH examines the unsolved mystery of the tunnels at Baia. Did ancient priests fool visitors to a sulphurous subterranean stream into believing that they had crossed the River Styx and entered Hades?

LEFT: The Phlegræan Fields painted in the 1780s by Michael Wutky. **BELOW:** A Cumæan sibyl by Andrea del Catagno.

There is nothing remotely Elysian about the Phlegræan Fields, which lie on the north shore of the Bay of Naples – nothing sylvan, nothing green. The Fields are part of the caldera of a volcano that is the twin of Mount Vesuvius, the destroyer of Pompeii, a few miles to the east. The volcano is still active, but today its most obvious feature is this barren, rubble-strewn plateau. Fire bursts from the rocks in places, and clouds of sulphurous gas snake out of vents that lead up from deep underground.

The Fields, in short, are hellish, and it is no surprise that they have always been associated with all manner of strange tales. Most interesting, perhaps, is the myth of the Cumæan sibyl, who took her name from the nearby town of Kyme – Cumæ – a Greek colony that flourished in about 550 BC, when the Etruscans still held sway over much of central Italy and Rome was nothing but a city-state ruled over by a line of tyrannical kings.

THE SYBIL AND THE CAVE

The sibyl, so the story goes, was a woman named Amalthæa who lurked in a cave on the Phlegræan Fields. She had once been young and beautiful – beautiful enough to attract the attentions of the Sun god Apollo, who offered her one wish in exchange for her virginity. Pointing to a heap of dust, Amalthæa asked for a year of life for each particle in the pile, but (as is usually the way in such old tales) she failed to allow for the vindictiveness of the gods. Ovid, in *Metamorphoses*, has her lament that "like a fool, I did not ask that all those years should come with ageless youth as well". Instead, she aged but could not die. Virgil depicted her scribbling predictions of the future on oak leaves that lay scattered about the entrance to her cave, and states that the cave itself concealed an entrance to the underworld.

The best known – and from our perspective the most interesting – of all the tales associated with the sibyl is supposed to date to the reign of Tarquinius Superbus – Tarquin the Proud. He was the last of the mythic kings of Rome, and some historians, at least, concede that he really did live and rule in the 6th century BC. According to legend, the sibyl travelled to Tarquin's palace bearing nine books of prophecy that set out the future of Rome. She offered the set to the king for a price so enormous that he summarily declined – at which the prophetess went away, burned the first three of the books, and returned, offering the remaining six to Tarquin at the same price. Once again, the king refused, though less arrogantly this time, and the sibyl burned three more of the precious volumes. The third time she approached the king, he

ABOVE: The ruins of Baia's Roman spa complex. Its pools were filled with warm water from underground sulphur springs. **BELOW:** The entrance to the "Antro della Sibilla" or Cave of the Sibyl in Cumæ, discovered by Amedeo Maiuri in 1932. Maiuri also uncovered the hidden entrance to Baia's 'Great Antrum' in the 1950s.

thought it wise to accede to her demands. Rome purchased the three remaining books of prophecy at the original steep price.

What makes this story of interest to historians as well as folklorists is that there is good evidence that three Greek scrolls, known collectively as the Sibylline Books, really were kept, closely guarded, for hundreds of years after the time of Tarquin the Proud. Secreted in a stone chest in a vault beneath the Temple of Jupiter, the scrolls were brought out at times of crisis and used, not as a detailed guide to the future of Rome, but as a manual that set out the rituals required to avert looming disasters. They served the Republic well until the temple burned down in 83 BC, and so vital were they thought to be that huge efforts were made to reassemble the lost prophecies by sending envoys to all the great towns of the known world to look for fragments that might have come from the same source. These reassembled prophecies were pressed back into service and not finally destroyed until AD 405, when they are thought to have been burned by a powerful general by the name of Flavius Stilicho.

The existence of the Sibylline Books certainly suggests that Rome took the legend of the Cumæan sibyl seriously, and indeed the geographer Strabo, writing at about the time of Christ, clearly states that there actually was "an Oracle of the Dead" somewhere in the Phlegræan Fields – a statement that implies, in turn, that the Romans believed an entrance to the underworld existed somewhere on the plateau. So it is scarcely surprising that

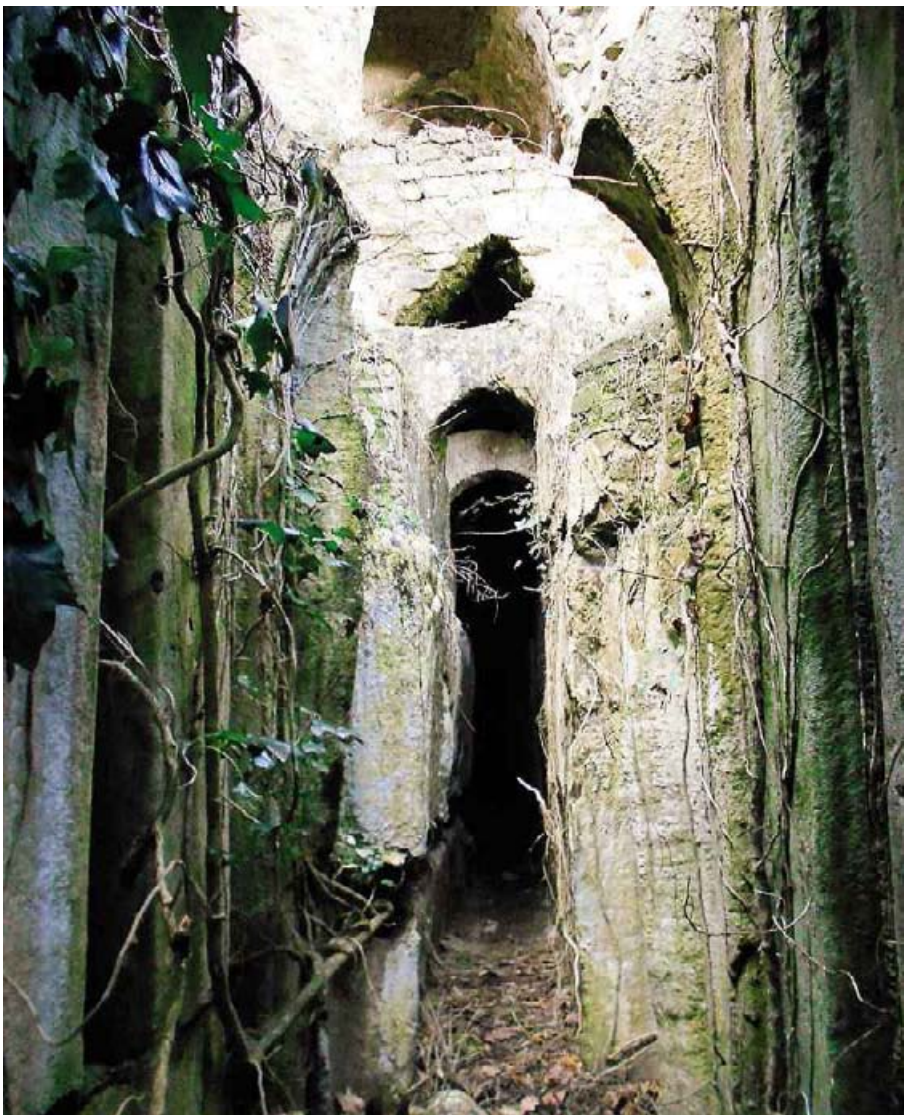
BAIA WAS A SPA NOTED FOR ITS CURES AND ITS IMMORALITY

archæologists and scholars of romantic bent have from time to time gone in search of a cave or tunnel that might be identified as the real home of a real sibyl – nor that some have hoped that they would discover an entrance, if not to Hades, then at least to some spectacular subterranean caverns.

Several spots have been identified as the *antro della sibilla* – the cave of the sibyl – over the years. None, though, led to anywhere that might reasonably be thought to be an entrance to the underworld. Because of this, the quest continued, and gradually the remaining searchers focused their attentions on the old Roman resort of Baia, which lies on the Bay of Naples at a spot where the Phlegræan Fields vanish beneath the Tyrrhenian Sea. Two thousand years ago, Baia was a flourishing spa, noted both for its mineral cures and for the scandalous immorality that flourished there. Today, it is little more than a collection of picturesque ruins – but it was there, in the 1950s, that the Italian archæologist Amedeo Maiuri discovered the entrance to a hitherto unknown antrum. It had been concealed for centuries beneath dense undergrowth sprouting from a vineyard; Maiuri's workers had to clear a 15ft (4.6m) thick accumulation of earth and vines to lay it bare.

The antrum at Baia proved difficult to explore. A sliver of tunnel, obviously ancient and manmade, disappeared into a hillside close to the ruins of what may be a Greek temple. The first curious onlookers who pressed their heads into its cramped entrance discovered a pitch-black passageway that was uncomfortably hot

ALEXANDER VAN LOON /CREATIVE COMMONS



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and – so Maiuri reported – wreathed in fumes; they penetrated only a few feet into the interior before beating a hasty retreat. There the mystery rested, and it was not revived until the site came to the attention of Robert Ferrand Paget – who liked everyone to call him "Doc" – in the early 1960s.

EXPLORING THE TUNNELS

Paget was not a proper archæologist. He was a metallurgical chemist (and nephew to Sidney Paget, the well-known illustrator of Sherlock Holmes) who had retired to the Bay of Naples and excavated as a hobby. As such, his theories need to be viewed with caution, and it is worth noting that when the academic *Papers of the British School at Rome* agreed to publish the results of the half-decade that he and an American colleague named Keith Jones spent investigating the tunnels, a firm distinction was drawn between the School's endorsement of Paget's plans of the interior and its refusal to pass comment on the theories he had come up with to explain when and why it had been built. These theories eventually made their appearance in book form, but attracted little attention – surprisingly, because the pair claimed to have stumbled across nothing less than a real-life "entrance to the underworld".

Paget was one of the handful of men who still hoped to locate the "cave of the sibyl" described by Virgil, and it was this obsession that made him willing to risk the inhospitable interior. He and Jones pressed their way though the narrow opening and found themselves inside a cramped tunnel, about 6ft (1.8m) tall but a mere 21in (53cm) wide. The temperature inside was uncomfortable but bearable, and the two men pressed on into a passage that, they claimed, had probably not been entered for 2,000 years.

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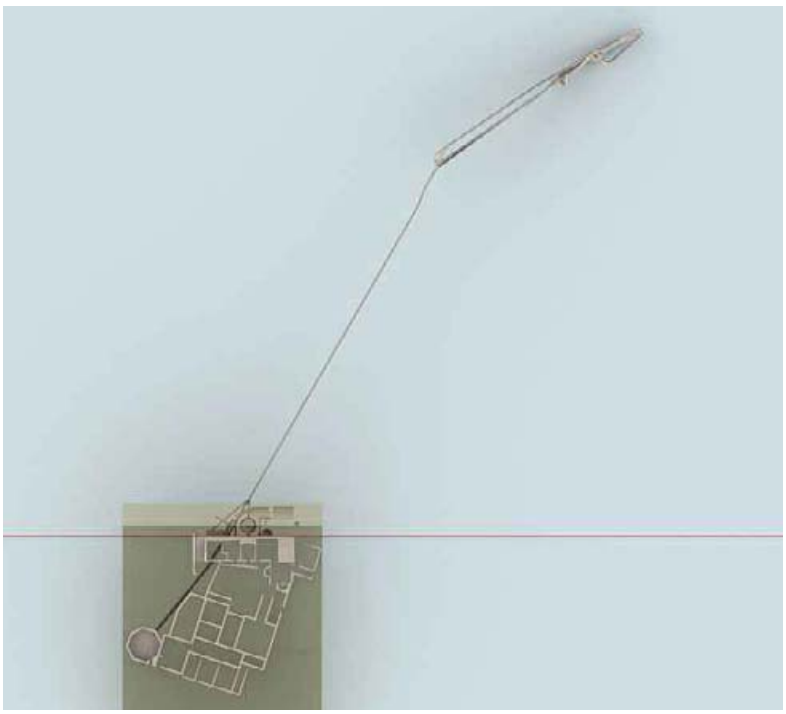
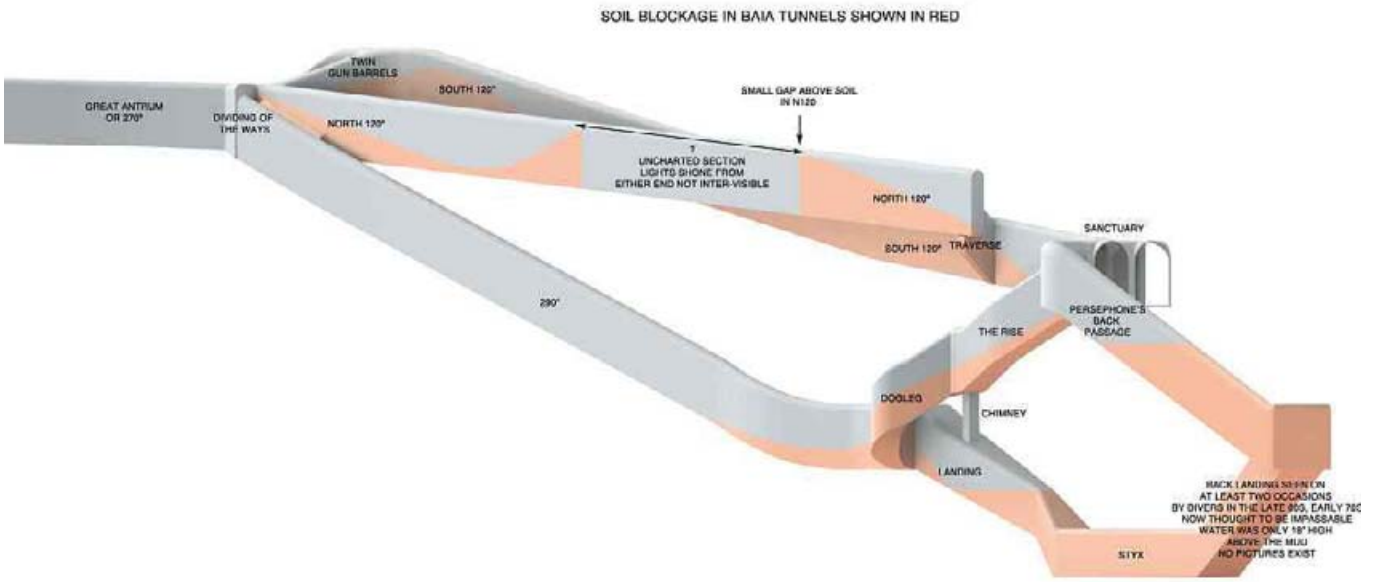


JOHN SMOUT

TOP: The entrance to the Great Antrum, first explored by "Doc" Paget in the 1960s. **ABOVE LEFT:** The Great Antrum, lined with Roman 'cocciopesto' waterproof cement. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A render from a 3-D model made by researcher John Smout. The shadow on the blue ground represents sea level. The 'River Styx' is only just above this level. Everything above the red line is inside the volcanic cliff, in solid rock.



JOHN SMOUT

BOTH PHOTOS: ORACLEOFTHEDEAD.COM

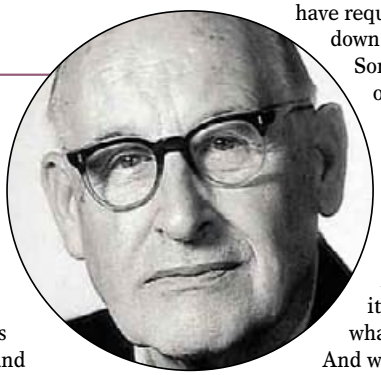
TOP: An elevation showing the tunnel system from the "Dividing of the Ways" and giving Paget's names for various features. The red portions represent those areas blocked with soil. **ABOVE LEFT:** Twin tunnels inexplicably divide and meet again behind the puzzling feature that Paget dubbed the "Dividing of the Ways". **ABOVE RIGHT:** View of the "Sanctuary" with tiled niche and arch bricked up by the Romans, seen from "South 120" and the "Rise". **BELOW:** "Doc" Paget.

It took Paget and Jones, working in difficult conditions, some time to explore what turned out to be a highly ambitious tunnel system. The interior included an oddly complex network of narrow passageways. The entrances to some of them proved to be disguised, and whose precise purpose Paget – and all those who have come after him – can only attempt to guess at.

The first of these peculiar features occurred about 400ft (125m) from the entrance, at a spot where the path diverged, only to merge again some 330ft (100m) further into the complex. Paget suggested that this "dividing of the ways" had at one time been masked by a wooden door. Swung closed, this would have masked one route to the lower levels. But, opened, it could have been used (so the explorer suggested) as a ventilation system; hot, vitiated air would be sucked out of the tunnel complex at ceiling level, while currents of cooler air from the surface were constantly drawn in along the floor.

As Paget and Jones went deeper into the hillside, two further puzzles revealed themselves. First, at the bottom of a much steeper passage, some 650ft (200m) inside the tunnel, they discovered an underground stream 6ft (1.8m) wide, which disappeared into the darkness. The river itself was hot to the touch. Fording it and ascending a steep passageway on the far bank, the men next came upon what they thought had been an "inner sanctuary". What this room was, or had been used for, remains a mystery; at some point in the tunnels' history, it had been laboriously filled in, and it has never been excavated. Further blockages were found elsewhere in the tunnel system; according to Paget's rough calculations, something like 7,000 cubic feet (200m^3) of soil had been carried in baskets from the surface, an operation that would have required 15,000 man-journeys down the narrow passageways. Somebody, he decided, had once been very anxious to stop up the tunnel system and conceal its purpose.

SOMEBODY HAD BEEN ANXIOUS TO STOP UP THE TUNNELS



AN ENTRANCE TO HADES?

So what was the "Great Antrum," as Paget called it? Who had built it – and what had it been used for? And who had blocked access to it? In time, "Doc" came up answers to all of those questions.

The tunnel system, he proposed, had been constructed by priests to mimic a visit

BOTH PHOTOS: ORACLEOFTHEDEAD.COM

ABOVE LEFT: The start of the underground watercourse, perhaps representing the River Styx, which the dead crossed to enter Hades. Although near sea level, the water is fresh and drinkable. **BELOW:** The writing on the wall, daubed over a lamp niche, that Paget believed read "Illius Mar". It is now thought to represent a date, "IIII KAL MAR".

to the Greeks' mythical underworld. In this interpretation, the underground stream represented the fabled River Styx, which the dead had to cross to enter Hades; a coracle, Paget speculated, would have been waiting to ferry visitors across, and a crossing made in darkness might have concealed the stream's meagre breadth. On the far side, initiates would have ascended to the hidden sanctuary, and it was there they would have met… whom? One possibility, "Doc" thought, was a priestess posing as a sibyl, and dispensing prophecies for a steep fee. For this reason he took to calling the complex the "Antrum of Initiation."

The tunnels, then, in Paget's view, might have been constructed to allow priests to persuade their patrons – or perhaps simply wealthy travellers – that they had journeyed to the underworld. The heightened temperatures below ground, combined, perhaps, with drifts of volcanic vapour, could certainly have given that impression. And if visitors were scared, befuddled, or even drugged, it would have been possible to create a powerfully otherworldly experience, one capable of persuading even the most sceptical of the priests' power.

In favour of this argument, "Doc" supposed, was the careful planning of the tunnels. He pointed to the huge number of lamp niches which had been built into the tunnel walls; there are more than 550 in all, and they come at the rate of one every three feet (90cm) in the lower levels, far more than

would have been required merely to provide illumination. This feature made no sense if the tunnels were (as more mainstream archæologists have always suggested) merely devised to channel warm air to Baia's famous Roman baths above. And the "dividing of the ways," with its hidden door, would have allowed a party of priests – and the "sibyl," too, perhaps – quick access to the hidden sanctuary.

Indeed, the whole system, Paget thought, closely matched ancient myths of visits to the underworld. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, for instance, the hero, Aeneas, crosses the Styx only once on his journey underground, emerging from Hades by an alternate route. The discovery of a further, blocked, tunnel at the back of the hill suggests that the complex at Baia may have been constructed to allow just such a journey. And since Virgil himself, in Paget's argument, had lived nearby, he might himself have been initiated into Baia's mysteries.

Dating the construction of the complex was a greater challenge. The explorers found little evidence inside the tunnels to point to the identity of the builders – just a mason's plumb bob in one niche, and some ancient graffiti, which can be read as a date: "IIII KAL MAR," or 26 February, in an unknown year. But, working on the assumption that the passages had once formed part of the surrounding temple complex, they concluded that they could best be dated to the late archaic period, around 550 BC – at pretty much the time, that is, that the Cumæan sibyl was said to have lived. If so (and Italian archæologists prefer to believe that the tunnels are later, and Roman) then the complex was almost certainly the work of the Greek colonists of Cumæ itself. As for when the tunnels were blocked up, that – wrote Paget – must have taken place after Virgil's time, during the early Imperial period of Roman history. But who exactly ordered the work, or why, he could not say.

In time, Paget and Jones resolved at least one of the Great Antrum's mysteries. In 1965 they persuaded a friend, Colonel David Lewis of the US Army, to investigate the Styx for them using scuba apparatus. Lewis and his son dived into the stream and followed it into a tunnel that dramatically deepened, discovering an underwater cave, along with the source of the stream's warmth: two springs of boiling water, superheated by the volcanic chambers of the Phlegræan Fields.

DONAR REISKOFFER

ABOVE: Sulphur drifts from a vent on the barren volcanic plateau of the Phlegræan Fields, a harsh moonscape associated with legends of prophecy. Might such fumes have been used by priests at Baia to help create a sense of descending into the underworld?

RIVERS OF FIRE

Whether Paget's elaborate theories are correct remains a matter of debate. It seems much more likely than not that the tunnel complex served some ritual purpose; in addition to the mute evidence of the lamp niches, the recent efforts of another British researcher, John Smout, have established that the entrance passageway was angled so that it would have been picked out and illuminated by the sunrise over Mount Vesuvius at each equinox around 500 BC. One central question may well be whether it is possible to see Paget's channel of "boiling water" deep underground as anything other than a deliberate representation of one of the fabled rivers that girdled Hades – if not the Styx itself, then perhaps the Phlegethon, the mythic "river of fire" that, in Dante's Inferno, boils the souls of the departed. And for all the scepticism of the archæologists, historians of the ancient world do not dispute that the powerful priests of antiquity were perfectly capable of mounting elaborate deceptions. A recent geological report on the far better known Greek oracle site at Delphi demonstrated that fissures in the rocks nearby brought intoxicating and anaesthetic gases to the surface at the spot (see **FT127:21, 181:48-50**), suggesting that it may have been selected and used for a purpose much like the one Paget proposed at Baia.

Yet much remains mysterious about the Great Antrum – its purpose, its still hidden exits, and, not least, the vexed question of how its ancient builders, working with primitive tools at the end of the Bronze Age, could possibly have known of the existence of the "River Styx," much less excavated a tunnel that so neatly intercepted it. There is no trace of the river at the surface – and we still have no real idea where its source is, or where it leads.

Little seems to have changed at Baia since Paget's day. His discoveries have made remarkably little impact on tourism at the ancient resort, and his willingness to embroider evidence (and, at least occasionally, to just make it up) means that work still needs to be done to unpick fact from fiction in the Great Antrum. Today, the network of passages is locked up and dangerous to enter. Little attempt is made to exploit the idea that the narrow entrance in the rock was once thought to be an entrance to the Romans' Hell – and, pending proper investigation by archæologists, not much more can be said about the tunnels' origin and purpose. But among the many mysteries of the ancient world, the Antrum on the Bay of Naples remains among the most intriguing. FT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to John Smout and Peter Knight for several illuminating discussions regarding the Oracle site and Doc Paget's claims. For full details of the tunnel complex, and to keep up to date with ongoing research at Baia, visit **www.oracleofthedead.com**.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

MIKE DASH is a longtime member of the Gang of Fort. He was FT's publisher for some years, as well as a regular contributor to the magazine, and is the acclaimed author of *Tulipomania*, *Batavia's Graveyard*, *Thug* and the Pulitzer Prize nominated *Satan's Circus* and *The First Family*.

DARKNESS VISIBLE

HELL IN THE CINEMA

Ever since the silent era, filmmakers have been putting their visions of Hell on the silver screen, and much of their inspiration derives from a 14th century Italian poet and a 19th century French artist. **REV PETER LAWS** descends to the fiery pits in search of the template for this celluloid inferno.

The dismal situation waste and wild.
A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,
As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames
No light; but rather darkness visible
(Milton, Paradise Lost)

It's a hideous spectacle, an eye-popping feast and a trailer-ready icon that audiences understand immediately. It's an eternal, pitiful, violent extravaganza – *plus* it has naked writhing. Hell was made for the cinema, and you won't just find it in the horror genre. The inferno heats up a surprising amount of comedies, schmaltzy dramas and cute Disney films too.

The concept of Hell has been our close companion ever since we realised we would die, and it's a founding fear of many (though by no means all) religions. From ancient times to the present day, artists have been unable to resist painting, sculpting and writing about what terrible things might happen to us on the dark side of death. Yet a brief wander through the visions of Hell presented on the cinema screen shows a very particular cultural influence. It's not that of the Ancient Greeks, Romans or Egyptians. The latter's ideas of the afterlife *were* pretty grim at times – the crocodile-headed demon Amut, who munches on the hearts of the immoral dead, comes to mind – but at least you faced annihilation soon after. The people who really laid the blueprint for the Hell of the movies were the Western Christians.

By the fourth century, theologians like St Augustine were already exploring Christianity's love affair with eschatology and apocalyptic terror. From then on, the Church would riff on the subject continually; and yet it was centuries later, in 1320, that the red shoots of the cinematic Hell really started to show. Dante Alighieri's epic poem *The Divine Comedy* is an exhausting trek through Heaven, Purgatory and the cosmic horror of the Inferno. After looking at the many Hells of the silver screen, you can't miss Dante's influence: this is a vision of Hell that carries an eternal X-Certificate, with imagery both hideous and haunting.

DORÉ PROVIDED THE FURNITURE FOR THE HELL OF THE MOVIES

LEFT: A poster for the 1935 Fox film *Dante's Inferno*. **FACING PAGE:** One of Gustave Doré's iconic 1861 illustrations of Dante's poem.

For Dante, the Inferno is a complex funnel of descending circles, flowing with rivers of blood that get hot enough to boil souls. There's torture and mayhem, but it's spooky too: take the eerie forests where people are eternally melded into tree stumps as punishment for their suicides. The influence of the poem would also be seen in that other great literary evocation of Hell, Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

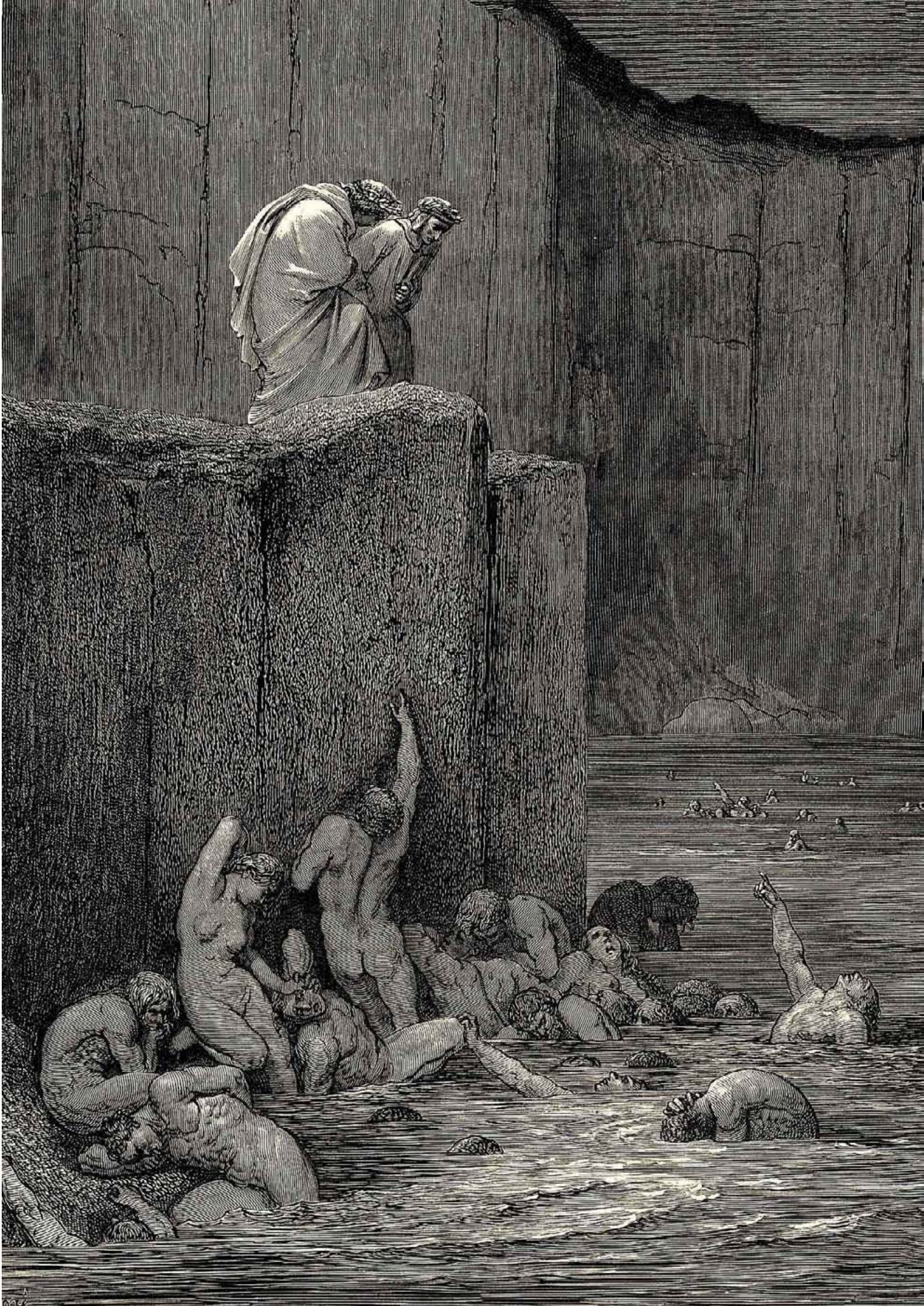
Later still, it was a 19th century illustrator of Dante's works, Gustave Doré, who helped cement the Italian poet's vision for the modern age. The French artist self-published his chilling engravings to accompany the poem in 1861: he may have been working 600 years after Dante, yet in terms of infernal imagery, the two men might be seen as co-conspirators in scaring the crap out of anybody with religious leanings.

Doré's illustrations of yawning abysses, sheer rock, coiling serpents and naked, squirming bodies – he also illustrated *Paradise Lost* in similar style – provided the common visual furniture for the Hell of the movies: throughout most of the 20th century, this was what Hell looked like.

STORYBOARDING HELL

It's no surprise, then, to find that cinema's first plunge into the pit has Dante's and Doré's fingerprints all over it. The ambitious *L'inferno (1911)* was Italy's first feature-length film. It's a still impressive theatrical staging of Dante's poem, with his gaping chasms and writhing sinners all present and correct. It's controversial too. A short sequence shows the prophet Mohammed damned forever and, as per the poem, his entrails are hanging out. Audiences might have been horrified at these visions, but they clearly loved being horrified: the film went on to become a worldwide hit.

In 1924, Hollywood followed the Italians' example. Tinseltown's first depiction of Hell came in a silent version of *Dante's Inferno* directed by Henry Otto. Yet it was nine years later that the key American version,



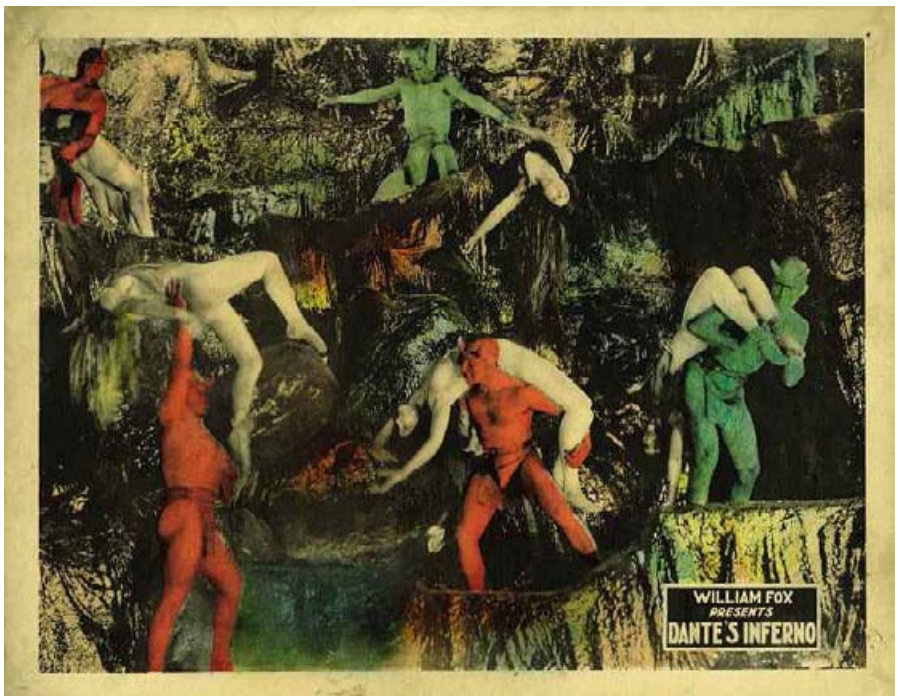
JOHN SPRINGER COLLECTION / CORBIS / CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: The 1935 Fox film *Dante's Inferno* offered the definitive cinematic treatment of Doré's vision. **BELOW:** A lobby card from the silent Hollywood version of 1924.

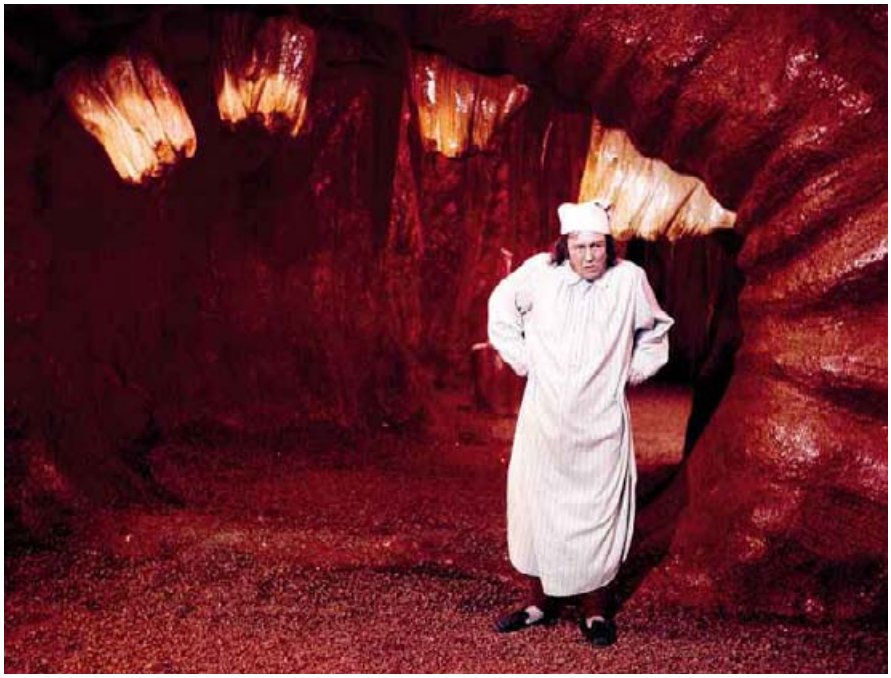
with a contemporary setting, hit cinema screens. *Dante's Inferno* (1935) starred Spencer Tracy as Jim Carter. He's a money-hungry fairground showman putting on lurid stagings of Dante's poem for sensation-loving punters. When he goes too far, and gets too greedy, he's presented with a vision of the *real* Inferno. Cue the high stony crags and abysmally deep gulfs, while flashes of fire descend and smoke belches up. It's an epic, haunting vision in which Doré's illustrations are brought to life on the screen. And, of course, as this was 1935, Hell now had recorded sound. Along with the nightmarish special effects we get the fluttering strings and groaning choirs of a full orchestration. It remains an astonishing, and genuinely freaky sequence, even today.

These early screen images of Hell grew even more influential because footage from the films was so often recycled in other movies. The 1935 version borrowed from the 1924 one, which itself lifted sequences from the Italian *L'inferno* of 1911. Footage from all of these films, and others like them (for example, *Maciste in Hell*, 1925) was still being re-used decades later. They crop up in everything from exploitation crime flicks like *Maniac* (1934) and *Hell-A-Vision* (1936) to Kenneth Anger's experimental *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954). They were even re-used in Ken Russell's mind-bending science fiction drug thriller *Altered States* (1980). Cinema has always been part of the socio-cognitive machine. Every time this footage was emulated or re-used, it did something to the public consciousness. It further cemented the Dante/Doré trademarks of Hell, which continued to manifest in all sorts of places.

A dazzling full-colour riff on Dante can be found in the second instalment of the



HERITAGE AUCTIONS



SILVER SCREEN COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Albert Finney descends to a Hell of both fire and ice in the 1970 film *Scrooge*, a musical adaptation of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.

HELL'S GUARDS PROD NAKED SINNERS WITH VICIOUS SPEARS

Coffin Joe trilogy, *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse* (1967). The film works like a twisted *Wizard of Oz*: most of it is shot in moody black and white; then, when we enter a lengthy and nightmarish sequence in Hell, it's colours set to max. The stagey foam-rock sets might look like something from a 1960s *Star Trek* episode, but the vibe is full-on Dante/Doré. Naked sinners slither along the floor, covered in what looks like chalk dust and mud, while Hell's guards prod them with vicious spears, and some of the damned are fused with the rock itself – all accompanied by a constant soundtrack of painful moans, explosive flashes and bizarrely, the squeal of a wild chimpanzee.

The poem's mediæval Christian influence is all over the schmaltzy (but visually inventive) drama *What Dreams May Come* (1998). Based on the novel by horror legend Richard Matheson, the film sees Robin Williams hopping from Heaven to Hell to save his wife, trapped down there for the crime of suicide. The movie goes for pat-on-the-back comfort rather than scares, but there are still some unsettling images to be found. From pale, naked bodies grabbing at a boat to faces stuck fast into the ground, these are all Dante-fuelled visions. You'll find similar imagery in Lucio Fulci's *The Beyond* (1981). His Hell is a dark and dusty wasteland with bodies seemingly strewn for miles. In the 2014 *Da Vinci Code*-style horror film *As Above So Below*, a team of explorers trek through the underground catacombs of Paris and find the gate of Hell. It bears, of course, the same inscription as Dante's: "Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here". Ignoring this warning unleashes a whole world of supernatural terror. Obviously.

These are just a few examples of how the apocalyptic literature of the Bible, expanded upon by theologians, was taken up by Dante, and then Doré, as the principal storyboarders of the cinematic Hell.

FIRE ON SET!

Dante and Milton have a fair amount of fire *and* ice in the abyss, but it's not often that a movie Hell uses both. *Scrooge*, the 1970 musical version of *A Christmas Carol*, is one of the few that does. Albert Finney, as Scrooge, tumbles into a red-hot hell where he is promptly made the chief clerk to Lucifer himself – but his office is below freezing. "You'll be the only one in hell who's chilly," says Alec Guinness as he closes the door.

But it's the fire of Hell that filmmakers have always latched on to. Indeed, when Disney released *Mickey's Christmas Carol* (1983) they had Scrooge McDuck tumbling into his deep grave-plot only to fall through his coffin into the fiery depths below.

Fire is cinema's go-to visual shorthand for for Hell depiction. It's quick, clear and cost-effective too. Lower budget films can't often afford long strolls through elaborately hellish sets. Show a few flashes of fire through a crack in the floor, however, and the audience knows exactly where they are. Films like *The Prophecy 2* (1998) and 1988's priest-vs-demon horror *The Unholy* both use this 'flash of orange light' to symbolise the underworld: it's cheap, but it does the trick.

GATEWAYS TO HELL

Does Hell have a door? The Ancient Greeks said you could reach it through Lake Avernus, near Cumæ, southern italy (see p32-37). Mediæval Christians were pretty sure the door was in a cave in Ireland. If you asked Tertullian, a prolific and influential Christian theologian of the early Church, he'd tell you that the gateway to Hell wasn't in any of those places at all: you'd find it "between the legs of a woman".

In the movies, unsurprisingly, the entrance to Hell is usually in America. It often crops up in dusty deserts, as in *The Devil's Rain* (1975), *Ghost Town* (1988) or *Highway to Hell* (1992). Even in Italian horror maestro Lucio Fulci's Gates of Hell trilogy, Hell breaks through in the swamps of the deep south as well as in a New England town. In *The Gate* from (1987) it's in a suburban American backyard. In Michael Winner's *The Sentinel* (1977) it's found in a brownstone Brooklyn apartment block. Wes Craven's *Invitation to Hell* (1984) has one that's pure 1980s: you can walk right into the land of eternal suffering via the keypad-coded doors of an exclusive yuppie health club. In *Ghostbusters* (1984), the gate's found in Sigourney Weaver's fridge (though to be fair, they don't specifically say Hell, so who knows?). Woody Allen's *Deconstructing Harry* (1997) presents a spectacular recreation of the Doré Hell, but it's accessed by a slowly descending lift, complete with a PA system and air conditioning. A similar mode of transport to the fiery depths was used in Alan Parker's *Angel Heart* (1987).

Quite where Hell is *actually* located is anyone's guess, though in 1989-91 reports suggested that it might be somewhere beneath Siberia (see **FT59:16** and "Driller Killer", **FT72:42-43**). At least that's according to a team of Russian engineers who drilled a hole there, nine miles deep. They broke through into a fiery chasm below and dropped a heat resistant microphone down with what must have been a *seriously* long jack lead. Miles beneath the Earth's surface, they recorded the tormented, mournful, agonized screams of "a great multitude of people". For many, this was proof of a literal Hell and the story spread like… well, like hellfire, particularly amongst Christian broadcasters eager to prove the reality of the abyss. Turns out, it was an urban legend – and horror movies were to blame. The sound was just the loop of some screaming sound effects from the 1972 Mario Bava film *Baron Blood*.

In fact, fire has become so synonymous with eternal damnation that films sometimes hold it back to trick the audience into thinking that they're *not* in Hell, even though they actually are. In the Amicus film *Tales from the Crypt* (1972) the unfortunate protagonists are shuffling through the dim corridors of a stone catacomb. We figure they're somewhere on Earth. When it's finally revealed to be Hell itself, the signifier kicks in… and a sharp-suited sinner falls into the lake of fire. Pretty much the same thing happens in the updated version, *Tales from the Hood* (1995), where the big Hell reveal isn't just a cue for belching fire but has a character sprouting horns and a satanic forked tongue. No prizes for subtlety there.

Movies like *Event Horizon* (1997) and *Constantine* (2005), or the Japanese *Jigoku* horror films, all present interesting and varied visions of Hell. Yet flames are the core symbol threaded through these and many others; so much so that the apocalyptic Schwarzenegger thriller *End of Days* (1999) suggests that Satan doesn't just live in hellfire, he carries it in his bladder. In one scene, the Devil, played by Gabriel Bryne, takes a leak in the street and flicks his cigarette into the gathering fluid. *Boom…* It turns out even Satan's urine is as flammable as petrol.

DRAG ME TO HELL

Many films assume Hell is something we either wake up into, post mortem, or is something we fall into when death comes (like Scrooge McDuck); but in some movies, demons stalk, terrorise and actively pull people down into the pit. We see this in the hit paranormal romance *Ghost* (1990). The film has a New Agey, 'death is nothing to fear' vibe, but it paints a surprisingly bleak and traditionalist view of what awaits the morally suspect. The 'bad' characters in *Ghost* get dragged away by squealing animated shadow characters. Jason Voorhees met a similar fate in *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday* (1993); though conveniently for the Franchise, his stay down below turned out to be far from permanent.

This idea of being physically pulled into the Inferno appears famously in Michelangelo's great fresco for the Sistine Chapel, *The Last Judgment*. Here, men are dragged down to Hell, sometimes even by the testicles. Being dragged off by demons is the key plot point of Sam Raimi's *Drag me to Hell* (2009). In this movie, however, Hell isn't just about physical displacement to the infernal realm: the hell-bound sinners change physically too. As one woman is dragged under the train tracks in a CGI frenzy of fire and flailing arms, we see her transformed into something ghoulish. This idea of humans changing form in Hell can be found in Dante to some degree (monstrous/human hybrids feature in the poem), yet in visual art and film, it's uncommon, with Hell's tortured souls remaining recognisably human for the most part.

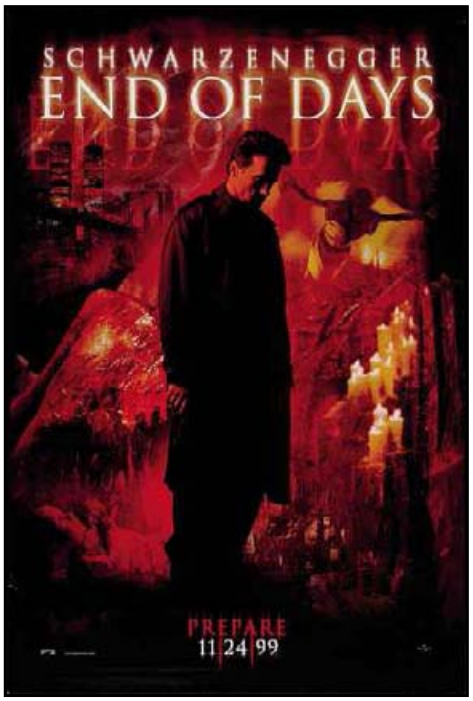
Such monsters derive from a different visual tradition than that of Doré's 19th century take on Dante, one of mediæval Hellmouths and Last Judgements, like those found in the works of Hieronymus Bosch. Scan his most ambitious painting, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, and you'll find a veritable *Where's Wally* of depravity. Naked sinners have flutes rammed up their rectums while others are bodily suspended through the strings of an eternally playing harp. Around them, grotesque demons of mixed human and animal form devour and humiliate them: yet the suffering humans *stay* human, from what we can see. It's not a vision of Hell that movies have made use of, although we catch a flavour of Bosch in the film *Haxan: Witchcraft Through the Ages.* The 1922 Swedish/Danish co-production might have been presented as a documentary, but it revelled in dramatised scenes of horror. In its depiction of Hell, we see a frantic, mechanical puppet show where demons torture the naked and the damned in flames, forever.

TO RULE IN HELL

Running a complex system designed to deliver everlasting pain must be a pretty tricky business, which means Hell is often presented as having some sort of malevolent Master in charge of it. Depictions of this overlord, usually Satan himself, vary from film to film. Comedy, by its nature, delights in employing stereotypes, so in *The Simpsons* and *South Park: The Movie*, for example, we get a standard image of a red-horned Lucifer. The latter, at least, adds some contemporary backstory: Satan is the gay lover of Saddam Hussein. In Adam Sandler's *Little Nicky (2000)*, Lucifer is a suave, horned Harvey Keitel who has the daily task of shoving a pineapple up Hitler's anus. Worse still… Hitler has to choose the pineapple.

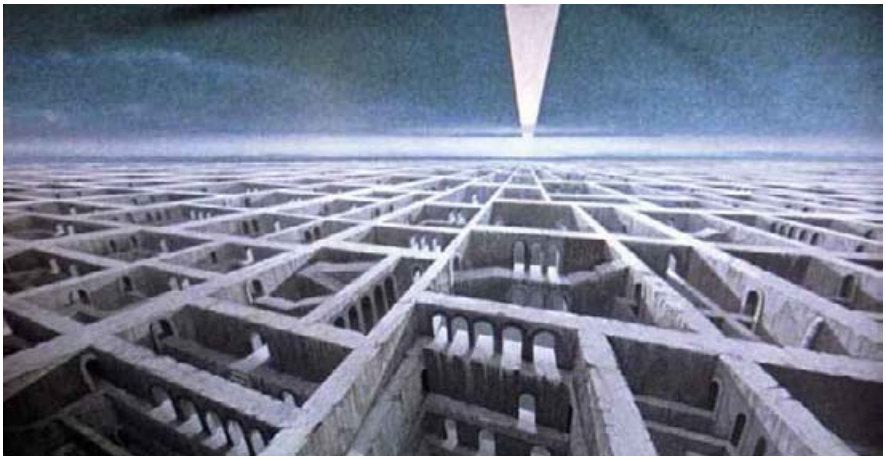
We find scarier images of Hell's overlord in some unexpected places. The animated movie *All Dogs Go to Heaven* (1989) has a dream sequence that suggests the film's title might not always be true. Charlie, a 'morally upstanding' dog, has a terrible nightmare of being sucked into Satan's realm, where he's chewed and torn by little dog demons, and the boss of Hell stomps in as a gigantic, canine monster. Scroll through a few Internet forums and you'll find plenty of people who were traumatised when they saw this scene as children.

This is all quite different from how the king of the demons is presented in Dante. Here, we find a three-faced Satan trapped in the core of Hell, which isn't hot but freezing cold. He's locked in ice while chewing, Amut-



AF ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Fire remains one of the most potent cinematic signifiers of hellish domains and human damnation, as shown by the poster for the Arnie's 1999 exercise in pre-millennial tension, *End of Days*, and a still from the 1997 scf-fi horror *Event Horizon* (or "*The Shining* in space" as some dubbed it).



ABOVE LEFT AND BELOW: The Escher-like labyrinth at the heart of 1988's *Hellraiser II: Hellbound* was a rare attempt to depart from the traditional cinematic model of Hell. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Another novel idea was the canister of green gloop in which Satan has been trapped – temporarily at least – in John Carpenter's 1987 *Prince of Darkness*.

style, on three famous sinners in each of his three mouths. There's one creepy and almost sympathetic detail too. Satan is weeping along with the rest of the damned – not an idea we tend to find in the various cinematic Hells.

An intriguing attempt at re-imagining the Lord of Hell comes in the 1988 film *Hellraiser II: Hellbound*, (the sequel to Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*),which paints a *very* different vision of both Hell and its master. There aren't the usual chasms of belching fire, but a cold, stone labyrinth, reminiscent of the work of Dutch graphic artist MC Escher, which is presided over by a geometric God-shape called Leviathan.

It's not a place of chaos, like the traditional cinematic Hell, but the home of a terrifying order in which metal is stronger than flesh – a superiority the inorganic Leviathan demonstrates by peeling back sections of people's faces and bodies. The vulnerability of the human form is mocked, making Hell a place of utter exposure. We are just transient victims shuffling about in fragile meat cases, and Leviathan exposes this fragility and rules over it. For cinema, it's a rare diversion from the typical Dante/Doré model.

A few other movies have tried to innovate Hell. Peter Jackson paints it as the innards of a fleshy, tentacled worm in *The Frighteners* (1996), while *Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey* (1991) suggests that Hell isn't just fire, but an eternal kiss from your hairy-lipped grandmother. "This is *not* what I expected this place to look like at all", says Ted. To which Bill replies: "Yeah, we've got totally lied to by our album covers." Then there's John Carpenter's under-rated theological horror *Prince of Darkness* (1987), in which an extraterrestrial Jesus traps Satan in green gloop… until the evil starts sloshing back out into the world. This spooky Hell is a dense black liquid realm, held behind a mirror. The demons reach out clawed hands to break through into our world – and when they finally do, everything goes black.

Then there's the 1992 comedy *Stay Tuned*. Here, Hell is being forced to star in a never-ending line up of demonic TV shows like *I Love Lucifer* or *Driving Over Miss Daisy*. I can think of worse things.

HERITAGE AUCTIONS

CLIVE BARKER TAKES US ON A DESCENT INTO HELL.
"Move over Freddy. Pinhead is the new horror hero."
"I have seen the future of horror ...his name is Clive Barker."
HELLBOUND
HELLRAISER II
TIME TO PLAY

A NICE PLACE TO VISIT, BUT…

While it's true that the imagery of Hell in Western cinema is largely fuelled by Christian ideas, the exact nature, and even the existence, of Satan's realm is a topic of fierce debate in current Christian theology. The headline-grabbing believers often insist that the traditional Dante/Doré imagery is an exact depiction of what Hell is like. Tap "HELL IS REAL" into YouTube and you'll meet hundreds who claim to have had actual glimpses of the place. I preached in a church just the other week where a member of the congregation said they'd been there once! Apparently, it's very dark.

Other Christians, like the late but still influential John Stott, think Hell is more like the atheist's idea of death: a kind of annihilation in which a person dies and is simply no more. Hell is indeed eternal, in this sense, but the dead aren't tortured, burned alive, or boiled in rivers of blood. Others, like hipster pastor Rob Bell, even argue that God will get what he ultimately hopes for in the end – love will win and all people, no matter what their beliefs, will find themselves in a blissful heaven. This 'Empty Hell' idea is labelled as heresy by many Church leaders, but it's a theory that deserves serious consideration.

However, despite these nuances in Christian belief, filmmakers and audiences find the traditional view more invigorating. Like it or not, Hell tends to inspire more convincing artistic expression than its heavenly counterpart. I won't lie: while I waded with difficulty through Dante's samey descriptions of the *Paradisio* and *Purgatorio*, the *Inferno* had me gripped. Ask someone to picture a work by Hieronymus Bosch, and it won't be the happy souls in Heaven they remember, even though Bosch painted them. It's the tortured souls of Hell that come immediately to mind.

Perhaps Hell's fleshy terrors and endless suffering are easier to imagine than the spectral perfections of Paradise. Wandering Heaven's golden streets or kicking back with an infinite, omnipotent God feel sort of abstract, even kitsch. That's not to say that Paradise does not, or cannot, exist – it's just that any attempt at creating 'a perfect world' in our finite minds seems to produce the weak stereotypes of wishful thinking.

But we *do* know what it's like to have our skins burned against a naked flame, or how it feels to be prodded with something sharp… like a pitchfork. We know what it sounds like when people scream, and we're all too familiar with human suffering. Regardless of whether or not Hell exists, the eternal abyss makes a sort of cultural sense to us. It has traction, particularly in horror cinema, but it burns equally brightly across the genre board – which is why filmmakers have always tried to make darkness visible, depicting Hell in such fun and frightening ways. In audiovisual terms, Hell is dramatic and emotional gold. Filmmakers can't resist it – and while we, the audience, may be scared to live there, we're weirdly keen to visit. FT

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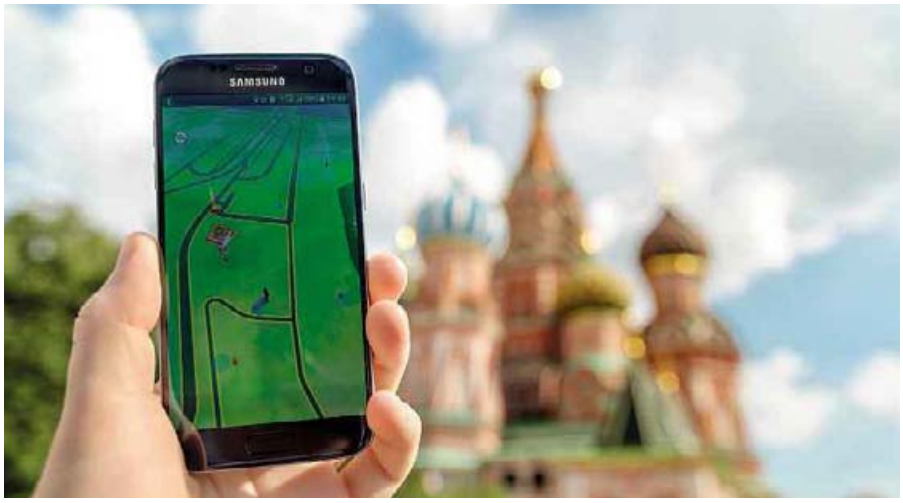
ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE ...

In the first of two reports, SD TUCKER slips on his VR-helmet to explore the strange post-modern world of Vladimir Putin's Russia, where mushrooms become men, imaginary weapons actually exist, and vampiric Pokémon act as spies for the West.

In November 2015, during a daily news-broadcast on Russian state TV, any watching Western defence analysts were given a chilling preview of one of the new super-weapons in President Vladimir Putin's expensively assembled nuclear arsenal. An 'accidental' glimpse was provided by an unwary cameraman of blueprints for a novel type of robotic nuclear-torpedo which, close analysis of stills showed, was intended to be launched across entire oceans from within the safety of Russian waters. Having the ability to completely destroy and irradiate enemy coastlines with a 100-megaton blast, and create a giant tsunami to wipe out life as far as 930 miles inland, it was a fearsome warhead indeed; or it would have been, had it actually existed. Many Western analysts expressed scepticism, but given that the mere *possibility* of such a device has now been raised, American defence planners will feel they have an obligation to look into it and devise possible countermeasures, thereby wasting valuable time, resources and manpower. Not a bad result – and all for the price of a piece of paper, 'inadvertently' displayed.[1] When you say you have a new weapon that probably doesn't exist but which forces your opponent to act *as if* it did exist, then in the current global standoff of Cold War 2.0, you effectively *do* have that new weapon. Welcome to Vladimir Putin's new, virtual-reality empire, as high-resolution a simulation of the old USSR as you're ever likely to find.

THROUGH A GLASS, WRONGLY

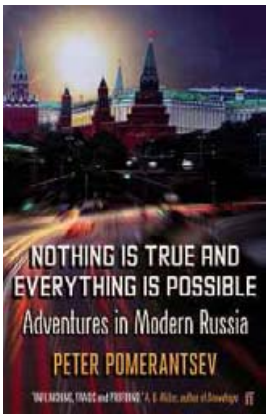
Muscovites also find themselves menaced by fictional threats from within Putin's Virtual Russia. For example, Nintendo's new monster-hunting augmented-reality smartphone app *Pokémon Go* has not only been condemned by the Orthodox Church as 'Satanic', as we saw last issue, (**FT345:4**) but also by figures from the military and government as being a danger to national security. Take Aleksandr Mikhailov, a retired Major-General from the FSB secret-police, who told Russian media in August that the locations of the hidden Pokémon in Russia, which are supposedly randomly generated by an in-game algorithm based upon a phone's GPS data, might not be so random after all. What if, Mikhailov asked, Bulbasaur and Snorlax had been deliberately placed next to sensitive military locations to take advantage of players' addiction to taking photos of Pokémon in situ? Just imagine that these creatures appear not in some city park, but at secret installations where a conscript-soldier or any other military serviceman photographs it with his camera, strictly of their own free will, without any pressure or coercion. This is an ideal scheme with which [Western] secret services can collect information. And no one would even pay attention, because it's such a trendy hobby. Whilst organisations like the CIA "most likely played no role in the development of *Pokémon Go*," added Mikhailov, "they will definitely use this opportunity to get information." In this scenario, Nintendo are



SERGEY TIMOFEEV / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

TOP: A 'leaked' image of Putin's robotic nuclear torpedo, which may or may not actually exist. **ABOVE:** Some Russian commentators think *Pokémon Go* is being used by Western intelligence agencies to spy on the Motherland.

just an accidental dupe, whose idea is being exploited by Shadowy Forces. For others, the situation is different. Yevgeny Fyodorov, a Deputy in Russia's Duma (parliament), posted online a film claiming the game was part of a conspiracy by the Japanese game giant to make Putin's United Russia Party collapse by sending people out onto the streets in their thousands, creating a state of ungovernable chaos and mass riots as they searched desperately for a rare Psyduck. [2]



For Igor Boev, director of a mental health clinic in Stavropol, the game represented a US-Japanese plot to transform the flower of Russian youth into brain-dead cretins, disrupting their studies to the extent that, within a generation, Russia's economy and social structure would be wholly ruined. There will be no businessmen or workers, or political figures, he predicted, gloomily. Instead of them there'll just be social Pokémons – that is, hopeless videogame addicts. If so, then this is hardly a zero-sum game the West is playing, with tales of Poké-morons quitting their jobs, studies and families to complete their imaginary collections pouring in from North America, Europe and Australasia as well. To combat such electronic evil, the Russian state has now released an antidote in the shape of a more nationalistically highbrow smartphone app, *Discover Moscow Photo*, which asks you to walk around the city playing virtual hide-and-seek with native cultural icons like Yuri Gagarin and Ivan the Terrible; Leon Trotsky is particularly well hidden. In a perceptive online article about Putin's Pokémon Panic, Eliot Borenstein, a Professor of Russian Studies in New York, commented on "the resemblance between the augmented-reality of *Pokémon Go* and the creation of phantom [Western-inspired] villains in the Russian media. If anything, *Pokémon Go* is a parody of the current Russian political scene; Russians should be on the lookout for 'fifth columnists', American-financed fake human-rights crusaders, gay and lesbian sexual predators, and anyone who dares to question the legality of Crimean annexation. This, too, is augmented-reality: asking Russians to look through a particular lens in order to see what isn't there." [3]

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

However, there may also be an occult angle to such outbreaks of state-sponsored virtual paranoia. Following the collapse of the USSR, Russia descended into a decade of social and economic chaos. Looking around them and seeing Russia's decline from world superpower to failing state where workers sometimes had to accept their wages in vodka, cabbages, toilet paper, bras or bicycles, people sought reasons for the new reality. Some resorted to the occult, seeing a web of hidden forces at work, whilst others retreated into the comfort zone of extreme nationalism, blaming the West for Russia's fall. A paranoid mixture of these two outlooks was also possible, as can be seen in a bestselling 1992 pamphlet from St Petersburg, called *How to Avoid Energy-Vampirism and How Not to Become a Vampire Yourself*. According to this profoundly weird document, Satan has criss-crossed the globe with a series of hidden craters, each of which contains an arch-vampire whose appearance "is similar to King Kong". These craters are supplied with energy sucked from human souls by a breed of lesser "cosmic vampires" who wander around draining people's life-force before transferring it into a network of pipes connected up to Satan's craters. Here, the Kong-beasts operate a kind of parallel power-grid, transforming stolen auras into renewable energy to fuel the Devil's plans. Fortunately, ordinary energy-vampires could be warded off simply by imagining oneself surrounded by a giant golden egg – but things were no longer that easy in the post-Soviet world. In the new free-market landscape, demonically inspired Western manufacturers had begun flooding the Russian market with various products that might have *appeared* to be inanimate but were really vampires in disguise. This so-called "masked vampirism" was particularly evident in Western electronic goods, which explains why screen-watching computer workers so often get headaches: because of the vampire living inside the PC, sucking their souls out through a hidden tube. Videogames were another key medium for the wicked West to import energy-vampires into Russia, the pamphlet stated, so we can see how the current Pokémon scare fits into the same basic pattern: looking through your US-designed iPhone screen and seeing a horde of Zubats hanging from the rafters must have made it seem, to some, as if the capitalist vampire-army had yet again returned. [4]

THE PLAY'S THE THING!

Here, we enter the rabbit-hole. It has often been alleged that Putin only achieved power at all because of another phantom menace, namely the supposed 'terrorists' who were supposed to have perpetrated the infamous apartment block bombings of September 1999, which killed 293 people and injured over 1,000 in cities throughout Russia. These are often suspected to have been a false-flag operation on behalf of Putin's allies, which allowed the then-PM to unleash his military upon the rebel province of Chechnya, whence the Islamist bombers officially blamed for the outrage hailed. As the outgoing President Boris Yeltsin shuffled off-stage to spend more time with his vodka-bottle, Putin became hailed as a hard-man hero, famously saying he would "kill [the terrorists] on the shitter" [5] if he had to, and being swept to power as President in the subsequent elections. Or is this just yet another paranoid conspiracy theory? Who knows? A 2015 book about Russia was called *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*, a very apt title indeed. Written by an ex-Russian TV producer, Peter Pomerantsev, it identified a Putin aide named Vladislav Surkov as being the true man behind the

ALEXEI NIKOLSKY / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: The book that fingered spin doctor and ex-theatre director Vladislav Surkov, "the Kremlin demiurge", as the man behind the bizarre blurring of fact and fiction in Putin's Russia. **ABOVE:** Putin has a word in Surkov's ear.

DMITRY SEREBRYAKOV /AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Sergey Kuryokhin appears on a fake episode of *The Fifth Wheel* TV programme in 1991 to present his theory that Lenin was a mushroom. **ABOVE RIGHT:** God's Will leader and anti-gay campaigner Dmitry Tsorionov (aka Enteo) is detained by Russian riot police at an unauthorised rally in Moscow in 2015. **BELOW:** A poster for an Enteo event.

blurring of fact and fiction in Putin's Russia. Simply put, Surkov is a spin-doctor, sometimes dubbed the 'Kremlin demiurge', who is in charge of nothing less than the manipulation of reality itself. A trained theatre producer and fan of avant-garde art, Surkov may have taken inspiration from a well-known event in Russian TV history: the day in May 1991 when the punk-musician and artist Sergey Kuryokhin appeared on a fake episode of a real documentary series, *The Fifth Wheel*, in which he seemed to prove that, prior to his death, Lenin had transformed into a giant mushroom. This was the *Glasnost* period, when all kinds of hitherto unknown truths about Soviet rule were being revealed by reformists, and this 'revelation' was taken at face-value by several million viewers. Kuryokhin's theory, presented in a thoroughly plodding way so as to appear more plausible, and with plenty of erudite references, was that 1917's Russian Revolution had been planned entirely by men who had been taking hallucinogenic magic-mushrooms for years, chief amongst them Lenin, and that "in the long run, mushrooms replaced their personalities and they turned into mushrooms". Lenin "was a fly agaric", Kuryokhin said, whose armoured-car served as a spawning-vehicle to disseminate the fungal-bloom of bolshevism to others. Due to the huge public reaction following the broadcast, officials had to issue an official denial of the 'news', explaining that "a mammal cannot be a plant". [6] Maybe not; but if the mass media could be abused to make the proles give credence to absurdities like mushroom-men, energy-vampires and Kong-demons, then what else could it make them believe?

After entering the Kremlin, Surkov had great fun finding out. Some people, for example, are gullible enough to believe his illusion that Russia is a genuine democracy, just because it has general elections and

THE REVOLUTION HAD BEEN PLANNED BY MEN TAKING MAGIC MUSHROOMS

opposition parties, which are essentially fakes. Surkov himself is on record as ordering the creation of such false parties, [7] but you have to be careful not to believe everything he says. Paradoxically, he is quite open about what he is doing, whilst simultaneously denying it. He appears, for example, to have written a bestselling 2008 novel, *Almost Zero*, under a male version of his wife's name. He provides the preface, calling it "the best book I have ever read", but denies both its authorship and the fact that it tells a satirical version of his own life-story (which it clearly does, being about a morally ambivalent PR-man happy to serve any master with enough cash). A fan of French post-modernist philosophers like Derrida, Surkov has absorbed their doubts that such a thing as 'reality' actually exists, and seems obsessed with the play-within-a-play structure of *Hamlet*. As such, Surkov has created a political stage in which all the men and women are merely players, their acts being seven shades of nonsense. Some play the villain, others the clown, but the only real hero is Putin. If you are media-literate enough to get the joke, then Surkov won't bother to hide it from you; he'll even let you laugh, and accept applause. The ultimate aim, though, is to sow confusion. Putin's rule is notably light on concrete ideology, making it hard to devise effective resistance to it, something that is made all the worse when you're not sure whether the opposition party you wish to join is really an opposition party at all, or a post-modern joke. [8] Like the art of countering imaginary weaponry, participating effectively within an imaginary democracy is almost impossible.

GOD'S GIFT TO WOMEN

As Gnostics will know, every demiurge needs a Higher God for whom to create a new physical reality, and in Surkov's case that idol is naturally Putin – who has recently become a tripartite deity. He is a god metaphorically, ruling all he surveys; he is a stud-like sex-god in Russian popular culture; and now, unbelievably, he has begun to worshipped as an *actual* god, by acolytes. The strongman-cult can be seen in things like Siberia's new Putin Café , where you can wipe your arse on toilet-paper bearing Barack Obama's face, or your dirty shoes on a Stars-and-Stripes doormat, whilst the sex-god persona manifests itself in such phenomena as butt-plugs cast in Putin's image and made from rough sandstone for those who want to know what it feels like to be savagely impaled by Vlad. Especially kitsch was the

Russian glossy *Hello!*-alike magazine *Secrets of the Stars*, which in 2008 broke sales records after devoting a whole issue to printing topless images of the President combined with swooning stories about him manfully decapitating rats with an axe ("I severed its head with one blow!"). The true exclusive in its pages, though, was an interview with Putin's then-wife Lyudmilla, in which she sensationally accused him of being an energy-vampire who had "sucked all the juices" out of her, a typically ironic sexual recasting of such imagery by Surkov's drones. [9]

Putin's transformation into a more literal god may well have been kick-started by Surkov himself, who in 2011 announced that he "honestly believes that Putin is a person who was sent to Russia by fate and by the Lord at a difficult time". The following year, Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church (which has been fully co-opted by the Kremlin as a promoter of their regime and fellow persecutor of Pokémon), agreed, calling Putin's leadership a "miracle of God". Worse, this August the Orthodox Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin said it would be basically fine for the President to kill his political opponents if he wanted to! In a photograph that circulated on social media, Russian soldiers bound for Ukraine were pictured lining up to kiss giant icons of a golden-haloed Putin, watched over by chanting Orthodox priests. From this it was but a short step to the creation of The Chapel of Russia's Resurrection in 2007, an all-female cult devoted to the veneration of an icon of Putin which 'miraculously' appeared from nowhere one day in the presence of the sect's founder, and which in 2012 began just as 'miraculously' bleeding pure myrrh. The Vlad-worshippers dress as nuns and sing patriotic Soviet-era songs to Putin, pray for his success, and anticipate him preparing the way for Christ's Second Coming. [10]

REUTERS / NATALIA PLANKINA / ALAMY

LEFT: Svetlana Frolova leads a service at the sanctuary of her Putin cult at Bolshaya Yelena. God spoke to Frolova and revealed that Putin is the reincarnation of St Paul the Apostle.

More ambiguous was a 2014 lecture held in Moscow entitled 'Will Putin Become God by Divine Grace?' by a self-styled "expert in metaphysical Putinism" named Dmitry Tsorionov. Tsorionov, better known by the handle 'Enteo', is the founder of the ultra-nationalist (some would say fascist) organisation God's Will, which is closely allied to the Orthodox Church. Advertising his event online with a tasteless image of Putin sitting on a throne and radiating heavenly light, Enteo promised attendees answers to such conundrums as: 'Will Vladimir Putin's mind take endless pleasure in the perfect knowledge granted him by God?'; 'Will he think the great thoughts of the Mind who created the universe?'; 'Is Vladimir Putin a god by nature or can he become one only by grace?'; and 'Can we worship Vladimir Vladimirovich as a god on Earth?' Those who attended to find out were surprised to find the lecture beginning with a not especially holy-sounding rap-song called *I Go Hard Like Vladimir Putin*, before Enteo appeared, speaking of how one day "Putin realised that his goal in life was God, and the Almighty entered into the body of Vladimir Putin [and] then Vladimir Putin began to do good deeds, like break up opposition meetings". Enteo's ultimate conclusion was that one day the "living temple" Putin would indeed become a "god-like being" and grow a long beard, as all gods should. "We are not worthy," he said, going all *Wayne's World*, and the audience left satisfied – because most of them had apparently come to laugh. [11] Was the whole thing satire, a critique of the growing Putin-cult, or a PR-stunt by the notoriously stunt-happy Enteo? Or was he sincere? It was hard to say whether this was an act of rebellion or of pure sycophancy – and it was *supposed* to be hard to say. Following the rap, Enteo's next act before beginning his speech was to read out a poem by – yes – Vladislav Surkov! Perhaps Enteo's follow-up lecture will ask his fans whether or not Putin will one day transform into a giant mushroom. FT

Next issue: Putin, Surkov and Darth Vader use an imaginary army to fight a fictional war with a non-existent enemy in a country which doesn't exist!

NOTES

1 www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34797252; http://europe.newsweek.com/putins-half-baked-secret-super-nuke-torpedo-real-398852?rm=eu

2 www.rt.com/politics/351286-retired-fsb-general-suspects-pokemon/; www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201607210053.html; Fyodorov seems to have been obsessed for years by the idea that NATO is attempting to foster revolution, so that the US could then steal Mother Russia's resources and reduce her native population "like happened with the American Indians".

3 www.huffingtonpost.com/eliot-borenstein/pokemon-go-and-paranoia_b_11570772.html; *Times*, 16 Aug 2016

4 Beatrice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, Cornell University Press, 1997, pp370-372; remember Marx's famous old comparison of capitalism to a vampire stalking Europe? For Russians being paid in random items, not money, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/177421.stm

5 Politer translations are available.

6 https://best-hoaxes.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/lenin-was-mushroom.html; http://modernnotion.com/why-millions-of-russians-once-believed-that-lenin-was-a-mushroom/

7 www.theguardian.com/world/2006/aug/17/russia.tomparfitt; www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/vladimir-kara-murza/russia%E2%80%99s-fake-and-real-opposition

8 An excellent essay by Peter Pomeranstev on Surkov is at www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n20/peter-pomerantsev/putins-rasputin; another essay by the BBC's Adam Curtis, relating the post-Soviet Russian avant-garde scene to Surkov, is at www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/entries/20c22534-f722-3d7a-b7ba-0506fcc00063

9 www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-35988175; www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/07/putin-butt-plug_n_4919509.html; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/2158556/Vladimir-Putin-hailed-as-virile-vampire.html; The Putin bum-plug actually appears to be a satirical creation criticising his attitude towards gay rights … or *is* it?

10 https://themoscowtimes.com/news/surkov-says-putin-is-gods-gift-8140; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/11530938/Vladimir-Putin-praises-Orthodox-Church-for-boosting-patriotism.html; http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/08/19/scholar-russian-orthodox-church-moscow-patriarchate-supports-domestic-repressions-militaristic-rhetoric-euromaidan-press/#arvlbdata; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/8509670/All-female-sect-worships-Vladimir-Putin-as-Paul-the-Apostle.html; http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/10/04/small-russian-orthodox-sect-considers-vladimir-putin-a-saint/; www.businessinsider.com.au/an-all-female-cult-worships-russian-president-vladimir-putin-2012-1

11 www.vocativ.com/world/russia/people-think-putin-is-a-god/; https://therussianreader.wordpress.com/tag/gods-will-fascist-group/; www.rferl.org/content/feature/26573039.html; https://warisboring.com/this-russian-activist-thinks-vladimir-putin-might-be-god-cfd9c6849873

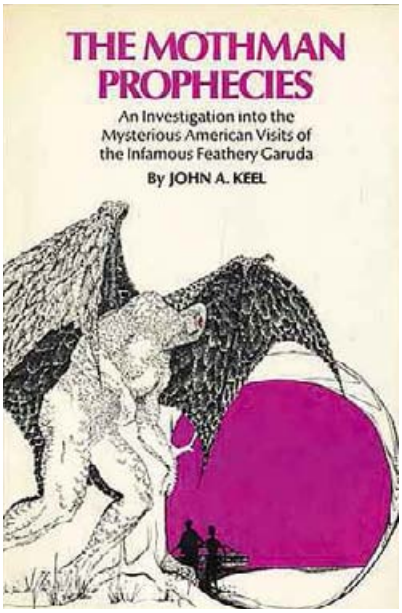
THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

14. WE ARE MEANT TO BE CRAZY

Everyone knows the book that kick-started their own interest in forteana. We've come across a surprising (to us) number of people who were first entranced into the subject by this issue's addition to the fortean library, John Keel's *The Mothman Prophecies*. It struck us as possibly significant that when first feasting on this daisy chain of a history of weirdness, most of our initiates seem to have been teenagers. A book that starts "Fingers of lightning tore holes in the black skies as an angry cloudburst drenched the surrealistic landscape" doesn't promise much to cultivated literary taste, but sitting under the chapter title 'Beelzebub Visits West Virginia' it does raise expectations of a rollicking good, slightly self-conscious, modern-gothic page-turner. And it's all supposed to be true! Besides, at the age of 14 or so, proper literature is what you do in school, yawn. Despite his opening hype, Keel does have a strange tale to tell, and between the episodes of oddity offers a kind of wisdom, or mode of provocative reflection, that sticks with you. That's not the only reason this became a seminal book. Keel tells his tale in best new-journalist style, involving himself pretty much every step (or flight) of the way, and he recounts as many strange and creepy things happening to him as happen to his numerous protagonist-witnesses. Keel didn't invent but certainly gave a huge boost to the myth of the Men In Black (MIB). He scarcely disguised his contempt for the extra-terrestrial hypothesis. And so he, along with sundry French commentators, plus Jacques Vallée and those associated with Merseyside UFO Bulletin and then *Magonia*, was a founding father of the synthesising tendency that was first called the New Ufology and later evolved into the faintly misnamed pychosocial hypothesis.

The Mothman Prophecies operates on several levels at once. On one face of the book we have the notion that the appearance of an anomalous creature dubbed 'Mothman' at, or mostly at, a disused munitions plant in West Virginia, was somehow proleptic of the collapse of the Silver Bridge, linking Point Pleasant with Gallipolis, Ohio, into the Ohio River, on 15 December 1967. Keel segues into a discussion of a plethora of UFO sightings occurring at around the same time (November 1966 to December 1967), and divers characters associated with them. These range from contactees of various kinds – including the deluded Woody Derenberger and his ET pal Indrid Cold, both of whom Keel appears to take seriously – to the MIB, who in their half-baked way follow him and many another witness around. Meanwhile almost everyone's telephone acts up with weird noises, cut-outs, mystery callers, senseless 'morse' code and so on, and Mothman, with giant wings, strange squeaks and glowing red eyes, carries on freaking out the locals – usually solitary, or in small groups – whereas the hordes of sightseers who descend on the little town see no unusual wildlife at all. It should be pointed out that this is a book rather more about UFOs, contactees and MIB than it is about Mothman (or prophecies) *per se*; but that's part of its convoluted point.


THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES
An Investigation into the Mysterious American Visits of the Infamous Feathery Garuda
By JOHN A. KEEL

Several Mothman witnesses were among those on the Silver Bridge when it collapsed, caught in a rush-hour traffic jam. Keel's "stable of contactees" – whose visitors tended, he wryly remarked, to "have names that sound like synthetic fabrics" – had been getting messages that there would be a monster "EM event", perhaps a nationwide power failure, on that date, timed by the 'space people' to coincide with President Lyndon Johnson's lighting up the Christmas tree on the White House lawn. In November, Mrs Mary Hyre, the local journalist, had had a horrible nightmare, in which there were "a lot of people drowning in the river and Christmas packages were floating everywhere". According to one witness, a dozen UFOs were circling the bridge while all other attention was fixed on rescuing survivors. These are the major dots that Keel joins to conclude that the Mothman was somehow part of the psychic build-up to the catastrophe, and that the 'space people' had deliberately misled him as to its nature ("They knew. They just didn't want me to warn anyone").

The more detached reaction to Keel's presumption is that any feeling of unease or even impending doom can be justified as premonitory when some disaster happens. And, just as you can justify a stiff drink at 6:00am because *some*place on Earth there's a bar open, there's always a disaster happening somewhere in the world that you can tie to your preceding forebodings. It's also a statistical certainty that from time to time, however occasionally, an extended contagion of disquiet, like that generated by the Mothman frenzy (fad?) around Point Pleasant, will be followed by some sudden and unexpected calamity nearby. It is equally inevitable that someone – perhaps most of us, secretly – will suspect that there is some underlying cause, perhaps working outside of time, and someone will fearlessly identify it. For instance, we have lately been reminded, there was no shortage of persons proclaiming that God's wrath had been invoked when the 'atheistic' Rev David Jenkins was consecrated Bishop of Durham at York Minster in 1984, especially when the LORD promptly struck the ancient building with lightning, resulting in a fire and costly repairs (**FT43:54-55**). Why He did not incinerate the wayward Bishop himself, and/or those who approved his elevation, is of course not explained. Perhaps the Deity wanted to watch what fun *Spitting Image* would have with the Bishop.

Keel settles on 'ultraterrestrials' as the ultimate source of Mothman, the UFOs, the MIB, the Silver Bridge disaster and his own many woes – along with every paranormal phenomenon you can think of. Just as there remains a problematic

lack of logic in why the Right Rev. David Jenkins himself wasn't flash-fried to a crisp in divine vengeance, so there is a certain vacancy in the QED department as to why these hypothetical entities should generate Mothman, UFOs and MIB, not to mention Keel's mountainous phone bills and other afflictions, in the run-up to the bridge collapse. The key to this conundrum lies in many acerbic remarks, and several paranoid ones, strewn throughout the book. *The Mothman Prophecies* is written like a stream-of-consciousness thriller, and so has clues to its nature hidden in plain sight; but not, it seems, in any calculatedly helpful order. It's worth looking at some of these in order to pick apart Keel's drift.

He is at least straightforward about his lack of interest in, and his disdain for, the paranormalist establishment. He is scathing about UFO organisations and researchers, among whom, incidentally, "paranoid-schizophrenics and obsessive-compulsive personalities" dominate the field: "The air force and CIA did not have to try to disrupt the ufological movement. It is by its very nature a self-disrupting network of disoriented people." In the first chapter he bluntly announces: "I am no longer particularly interested in the manifestations of the phenomenon. I am pursuing the source of the phenomenon itself. To do this, I have objectively divorced myself from all the popular frames of reference. I am not concerned with beliefs but with the cosmic mechanism which has generated and perpetuated those beliefs." Yet he does not exactly dispose of such beliefs or the "popular frames of reference", as he broadcasts factoids and generalisations – and not a few half-truths – throughout. Just a page later, for example, he tells us a tad tendentiously that "telepathy is now a tested and verified phenomenon". Elsewhere he says that Mothman "seemed to have a penchant for scaring females who were menstruating, another UFO/hairy monster peculiarity" – funny we didn't hear of that before, but Keel insists on the point later. Apparently, while also favouring garbage dumps as places to manifest, "UFOs often zero in on lovers in parked cars. Many – most – of the monster episodes in my files took place in remote lovers' lanes… The phenomenon has an almost pornographic preoccupation with our mating practices… Could it be that some people are programmed to love by this mysterious force?" Anticipating the Hopkins-Jacobs school of abductee lore by some years, he claims that a "surprising number of contactees [Keel includes abductees under this head] were orphans and through them the whole 'hybrid' concept was launched" whereby "more and more Earthly women would be impregnated by spacemen and eventually the whole planet would be populated with a hybrid race". Keel sees this as "just an updated version of the biblical begatting theme". "Thousands" of people had been abducted (or thought they had) by the mid 1970s, an exaggeration at best. The

> "OUTSIDE OF A DOG, A BOOK IS MAN'S BEST FRIEND. INSIDE OF A DOG IT'S TOO DARK TO READ.."
>
> *Groucho Marx*

"ancient gods dwelling on mountaintops directly ruled large segments of the population in the Orient, Greece, Rome, Africa, and South America" but were no more 'real' than the "fictitious space people" of today. (Read Homer carefully, and quibble over the Greeks, at least.) He offers a cod-science description of how hairy beasts, UFOs and such materialise and dematerialise along the electro-magnetic spectrum (that old chestnut again). All this and much more like it is sandwiched between segments of a chaotic and barely chronological account of his 13 months' entanglement with people and events at Point Pleasant. It seems not unfair to suggest that the book was written intentionally to disorient the reader, in a kind of mimesis of what 'the phenomenon' does and what Keel says happened to him over that period.

Behind all the carry-on, Keel says, lie the 'ultraterrestrials'. This isn't something he works up to: within 60 pages he lays the idea out. He first makes the crucial point that he has found that witnesses to "chimerical" events suffer from effects and symptoms "which have been observed throughout history in religious miracles… demonology, occult phenomena, and contacts with fairies. All of these manifestations clearly share a common source or cause." But Keel sidesteps the obvious conclusion.

"My long and very expensive excursions into the borderland where the real and unreal merge have failed to produce any evidence of any kind to support the idea that we are entertaining shy strangers from some other galaxy. Rather, I have come to realize that we have been observing complex forces which have always been an essential part of our immediate environment. Instead of thinking in terms of extraterrestrials, I have adopted the concept of ultraterrestrials – beings and forces which coexist with us but are on another time frame; that is, they operate outside the limits of our time-space continuum yet have the ability to cross over into our reality. This other world is not a place, however, as Mars and Andromeda are places, but is a state of energy."

Ultraterrestrials are the bees' knees at camouflage, misdirection and disguise, so flying saucers (or fairies) are "transmogrifications of energy under the control of some unknown extra-dimensional intelligence… manipulating… human beings through… mystical illumination. Our religions are based upon our longtime awareness of this intelligence and our struggle to reduce it to humanly acceptable terms." And it victimises us. So Keel can say, in a 2001 afterword: "Many forms of religious and political fanaticism are linked directly… to paranoia and schizophrenia. We are meant to be crazy. It is an important part of the human condition… This planet is haunted by us; the other occupants just evade boredom by filling our skies and seas with monsters."

It seems that no one has ever been entirely sure, reading Keel, where truth ends and fiction begins and where imagination sits, be it in the middle or at the ends. That he exaggerated and invented no one seems to dispute, and his new-journalist placement of himself at the centre of the Mothman drama wrecks any sense of objectivity. There is, presumably, a core of truth amid all the excitements; and, when he chose, Keel could be an assiduous and original researcher – as when, albeit mistakenly, he lit on the Japanese incendiary *fu-go* balloon as a solution to the Roswell crash. His ultraterrestrials irritated nuts-and-bolts UFO buffs, but he slithered away from them in a 1985 interview: "If you read my books carefully, you will see that 'ultraterrestrials' are a literary device, not a theory," he told Richard Toronto in *Shavertron*. Keel elaborated on this in *Fortean Times* (**FT40:3-5**): "Even now people… are still assuming that ultraterrestrials are actual entities… what I said in five books, carefully spelled out and defined, is that *we* are the intelligence which controls the phenomena." Yes, there are hints (see above, *passim*), but scarcely spelled out: 'scurried past' might be a better expression.

Read Keel, and especially this book, and you will be eating a certain kind of apple. But, even if Keel abandoned fortean impartiality in the course of *The Mothman Prophecies*, we can be pleased to acknowledge that 40 years after it appeared, and despite sundry attempts, no one's yet quite pinned down Mothman's identity. And the MIB still roam the outer limits. FT

Many thanks to Isaac Koi and Dr David Clarke (notably the latter's "A New Demonology: John Keel and The Mothman Prophecies", in *Damned Facts: Essays on Religion, Folklore and the Paranormal*, ed. Jack Hunter & Jeffrey J Kripal, Aporetic Press 2016) for supplying elusive reference material for this piece.

John Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies*, New English Library (Hodder & Stoughton), revised edition 2002

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Spirits of Place

FR MAHER reports on a symposium held under the #FolkloreThursday banner and exploring the Liverpool area

FR MAHER is the author of *The Last Changeling* and the *Horror in a Hurry* series of novellas. She is the organiser of The Legendary Llangollen Faery Festival.

The #FolkloreThursday hashtag has become something of a global phenomenon on social media, tweeted about by the likes of Guillermo Del Toro and this very magazine. Earlier this year, one of its creators, John Reppion, organised *Spirits of Place*, a multi-disciplinary symposium on the psychogeography of Merseyside. The event was held in Calderstones Mansion, Liverpool, where a wide range of speakers (including a number of FT contributors) addressed a well-informed audience.

John, author of *800 Years of Haunted Liverpool*, began by describing Calderstones Park, once a private estate, now one of Liverpool's most beautiful public open spaces. From the tree spirits of the Japanese Garden to the American Indian 'fairies' infesting the imported giant redwoods brought to Liverpool from the US, each area had its *genius loci*, including the giant statues guarding the gates and the humble fairy ring that appears not far from the foot of the ancient (some say 1,000 years old) Allerton Oak. It was a suitably creepy appetiser for a deliciously strange day.

In "The Victorian *Titanic*", Gill Hoffs recounted a forgotten tragedy. Built in haste to catch the Australian gold rush, *RMS Tayleur's* revolutionary metal hull confused her compasses and she slammed into an island off Dublin. Out of approximately 700 passengers, fewer than 300 survived. The *Tayleur* tragedy eerily foreshadowed the sinking of the *Titanic*; she too was a ship of the White Star Line and there weren't enough lifeboats.

David Southwell, creator of the cunning book *Hookland* (a detailed guide to a place that only exists in the imagination), described Calderstones as, "*Ghost soil, a natural preserve for temple shades*". History, both communal and prosaically personal, mixes with shared mythic reality and stories get 'pinned' to things – especially trees.

The Allerton Oak is split almost in half, the damage attributed to gunpowder ship *The Lotty Sleigh*, which blew up on the Mersey in 1864. A young John Lennon is rumoured to have been caught smoking dope beneath its shade, and during World War II women sent leaves from it to bring their soldier husbands home. David discovered that someone had sent a leaf to his grandfather in 1941 – but it wasn't his grandmother!

'Landscape punk' Gary Budden insists landscape doesn't have to be beautiful to generate mythic writing. Stories are embedded in the world about us – in metal and brick, concrete and wood, in the very earth beneath our feet – both literally and metaphorically. Our history surrounds us and the stories we tell, true or otherwise, are always rooted in what has gone before.

Adam Scovell's "Wyrd Wirral" talk celebrated the "English eerie" and explored the liminal landscape between the rivers Mersey and Dee. The setting for Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, it has been mythologised for millennia. Vikings fought in what is now an Asda car park and a standing stone in Wallasey was reputedly climbed by early Everest mountaineer Andrew Irvine. Alan Garner's book *The Owl Service* was filmed in Bebington and *Thieving Fear* by Ramsey Campbell was set on the peninsula.

ABOVE: Today, the Calderstones enjoy life under glass.

"Spirals in the Landscape" by Urban Prehistorian Kevin Brophy considered the impact of urban expansion. Prehistory is embedded in our towns and cities, and dolmens can be beached on street corners, often caged by railings. Many Glaswegians were horrified when their Cochno Stone was buried, the suggestion being that they couldn't be trusted not to vandalise it. Briefly exhumed last year and its markings recorded, there are plans for it to be uncovered permanently.

In "Where The Buddleia Grows", Ian 'Cat' Vincent examined "useful places for urban magic" – industrial borderlands where the line between 'natural' and 'constructed' is often blurred, "though nature always finds a way to break through".

After a brief description of the 'Calderstones' – a group of six Neolithic sandstone boulders that give the current park and mansion their name – by urban pre-historian Kevin Brophy, local legend Ramsey Campbell was interviewed about folk horror.

Described by the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* as "Britain's most respected living horror writer", Ramsey defined folk horror as the place where landscape and folklore come together to produce unnerving and uncanny forms. The benign looking, 70-year-old master of terror read chilling passages from his novel *Creatures of the Pool*.

As #FolkloreThursday's Dee Dee Chainey was unable to attend, Ron Cowell stepped in, looking at recently discovered prehistoric carvings in nearby Sefton that predate the Calderstones. With Richard Macdonald on the 'modern' (post-prehistory) history of the Calderstones, it was a packed day. A slimmer list of speakers would perhaps have given listeners more thinking space, but this first event from #FolkloreThursday was beautiful, unsettling and richly rewarding. FT

There will be dragons

Are the nature reserves and lakes of South Dakota really home to giant, serpentine creatures? JEROME CLARK recounts a family monster sighting and wonders why we see so vividly things that simply can't be there.

JEROME CLARK is a lifelong fortean and regular FT contributor, author of more than 20 books grappling with anomalies. He continues to grapple from his little town on the prairie.

A dozen or so years ago, my older son Alex, who was then in his early 30s, observed an extraordinary phenomenon in the company of two other witnesses. One was his mother, who is my ex-wife, and my former mother-in-law. In the interest of privacy protection, I'll refer to the former as 'P' and her mother as 'E' (since deceased).

Spring fed and formed by glacial activity thousands of years ago, Pickerel Lake, covering 955 acres (386ha) in the northeastern corner of South Dakota, is among the deepest bodies of water in the Dakotas. When I was married to Alex's mother – not recently – I spent part of every summer at my in-laws' cabin on Pickerel's shore. In all that time, though, I heard of nothing particularly unusual. Neither, at the time of their sighting, had Alex, his mother, or his grandmother.

The episode commenced on a quiet summer mid-afternoon broken suddenly by E's urgent summons to P. "You should see this," she said. P then alerted Alex, who quickly joined the company. E was staring out on the placid water at something situated about, at a maximum estimate, a quarter mile (400m) away (deduced from its proximity to a familiar landmark). The object that had caught their attention was so clearly visible that the three were confident it could not be mistaken for something else. Then and later, Alex and his mother emphatically rejected any suggestion that they had observed a log or anything comparably prosaic.

What they were seeing made no sense to them. It was an immense serpent, 40 to 50ft (12 to 15m) long, an estimated 2ft (60cm) in diameter, moving in an undulating fashion on or near the surface, its head poking above. Alex and P would recall independently that the head was not serpentine but "dragon-like". P compared it specifically – and Alex concurred – to something that once adorned the leading edge of Norse ships. Its body was proportioned like a snake's. After a couple of minutes, it was lost to view, apparently having sunk.

P would later state flatly: "It was a sea monster." But it was such only in the way that 19th-American newspapers called lake monsters "sea serpents" – in other words, generically, not exactly. Located in the north-central section of the United States, South Dakota is distant from any sea. Still, it is noteworthy that the vocabulary had carried over from the 19th century, when sightings like these were often chronicled, or at least noted in passing (perhaps in recognition of their frequency), in just about any US newspaper. One gets the impression that every lake was *expected* to house a monster.

By the earlier 1900s, however, press accounts declined, without ever quite falling into extinction (see Mark Greener, "The Golden Age of Sea Serpents", **FT260:32-38**). I suspect this had to do, in part, with improved journalistic standards, beginning with the passing of the habit some small-town editors apparently entertained of filling vacant spaces with yarns concocted to amuse their readers, who may have recognised the jokey local references later generations would miss. No doubt there also was a growing reluctance to publish sensational, hard-to-believe claims even from seemingly earnest individuals, in the interest of sobriety and respectability. Beyond that, even in many of the ostensibly straightforward accounts, it is sometimes possible to discern a likely explanation in the form of the form of an unusually large, though ordinary, fish. Yet....

In our time, with the exception of Lake Champlain (see **FT182:44-47**), Americans do not expect scary creatures in their lakes. Monster traditions faded long ago, as my friend Chad Lewis documents in his *Lake Monsters of Wisconsin* (2016), in which he follows up on press accounts from a century and more ago to determine if any contemporary resident knows of a monster in the local lake, or even a monster legend associated with it. Virtually without exception, the answer turns out to be no. Sceptics would argue that this proves the reports were always ephemeral fictions, and they surely are correct in most cases. One might also deduce that perceived sightings were more or less one-offs, which were lost to popular recall soon after.

At Lake Champlain, as others have noted, a creature first mentioned in print in the early 19th century evolved from an immense serpent in its formative decades to something like an American Loch Ness plesiosaur by the mid-20th century. American lake monsters of long ago were described variously (or just as often not described at all), and it is easy to shrug them all off as inventions and mistakes, a variant of the once ubiquitous "snake story" which encompassed other fantastic reptilian critters: hoop snakes (**FT292:42-45**), glass snakes, stomach snakes, and sky serpents (**FT248:30-36**). Or it would be, anyway, if sightings were confined to long ago, when everybody from prankster to editorial fantasist to over-lubricated observer to sincere witness arguably worth heeding is dead and in no position to comment. Fewer sightings, it ought to be stressed, are not at all the same thing as non-existent sightings.

For all the problems with the journalism of a wild and woollier, pre-professionalised era, a survey of those old stories leads one to observe that "serpent" typically meant "snake." That was the template, at any rate. There were discordant features, almost as if random reptile parts had been attached: alligator jaws, lizard legs, fins, varying colours. On occasion the alleged witnesses seem impressive: ship's captains, military officers, and the like. Here is an example:

Early on the morning of 13 July, 1892, according to New York's *Fort Covington Sun* (4 Aug 1892): "While the schooner *Madeline Dowing*, on its way from Buffalo to the city [Toledo, Ohio], was passing the Dunning… in Lake Erie, Captain Patrick Woods saw, about half a mile [800m] ahead, the waters of the lake lashed into foam. Drawing near, to the surprise of the captain and all on board, a huge serpent… lay at full length on the surface of the water.... The serpent was about 50ft [15m] in length and not less than four feet [1.2m] in circumference… a terrible looking object [with] a large head. Fins were plainly seen."

A more typical item, this from the *New York Times* (3 Sept 1886), notes

persistent sightings of a "genuine sea monster" in Narrow Lake, Michigan: "The monster… raises itself out of the water on moonlight nights to a height of 10 feet [3m] and then disappears. Its body is said to be about the size of a stove pipe and its head to resemble that of a serpent."

I cite these two reports because (1) they aren't transparently phony or jokey (in other words, relatively restrained as these things go) and (2) they bear some broad resemblance to what my son spotted alongside his mother and grandmother. Yet they're different, each with its distinctive features. This discontinuity persists in much larger report samples.

The three witnesses with whom I have a personal connection learned subsequently that other longtime lake residents, both white and American Indian, were aware of monster rumours. They had seen or heard something themselves, or knew of others' sightings from other years, but mostly kept silent for the usual reasons. (Pickerel, incidentally, is on the Lake Traverse Reservation of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate band, with a significant Indian population.) The account that opens this piece is the first published airing of a sighting there that I am aware of. For that matter, printed mention of a Pickerel serpent till now has been confined to a short paragraph in a book I wrote several years ago.

The moral of the story: lake monsters do not always depend upon publicity to sustain their existence. The usual hand-waving dismissal, which holds that such things exist only to lure tourists, does not apply here. Hoaxes, jokes, and misperceptions (all real enough) notwithstanding, honest, clear-thinking persons do see weird fresh-water creatures they cannot identify, and in good viewing conditions.

Even so, the physical evidence for water-bound cryptids is close enough to zero to raise doubts even in the most sympathetic listener or reader. It need hardly be said – and if it were otherwise, we'd all know about it – there are no bodies, no reason to think there are breeding populations of large to huge undiscovered animals practically under our noses. Their presence would surely manifest more conclusively than in the occasional sighting. We also have only the broadest resemblance to link one sighted creature to another. It's as if reports take their inspiration from the *idea* of a monster in a lake, and a shifting idea at that, rather than from a living, breathing animal.

As all *FT* readers know, debates about such things have raged forever. We know, too, that they get us nowhere. There have always been no more than two sides, one (which includes not just proponents but actual witnesses, understandably) offering up an extraordinary claim – i.e., such things are, and are more or less as described – while the other retorts with explanations, as often as not laced with ridicule, passing as prosaic but sometimes begging their own questions. One side ends up feeling grievously wronged, the other smug and self-righteous. And at this rate we have decades, maybe centuries, of such posturing to go.

ABOVE: While American lake monsters no longer feature in many newspaper reports, they have made the odd splash in the movies, such as this 1977 effort featuring a stop-motion creature terrorising a lake in Northern California.

I don't believe that lake monsters are cryptids any more than I believe they're logs, otters, beavers, sturgeon, or any of the other usual suspects. I do believe they're imaginary, and I am just as convinced that they aren't *only* that. You can "see" one, even if the verb is not self-explanatory. The thing "seen" is at once there and not there, blurring ontological categories in defiance of all our understanding of how things operate in the world.

Like so many other high-strangeness anomalies, from fairies to hairy bipeds to alien humanoids, lake monsters are limited to experience, followed by memory and testimony. They are not event (verifiable or potentially verifiable) phenomena, however vivid (and these experiences are if nothing else *vivid*), and they are not demonstrable because they haven't taken place within material, in this case zoological, reality. They may not exist when you're not observing them. Which doesn't mean they are entirely subjective and hallucinatory; encounters with the fantastic occur routinely to more than one person at a time.

I call such things "experience anomalies" (for a fuller exposition, see **FT243:42-47**). The concept acknowledges the reality, which ought to be self-evident by now, that not all fantastic perceptions are errors and fictions, even as it does not force us to reinvent the world to accommodate entities whose earthly habitation – as what they seem to be – has proved notoriously difficult to demonstrate in any literal sense.

Which means perhaps that lake monsters are less unexplained than inexplicable, manifestations of a shadowy, half-dreamed, half-real realm we humans encounter, likely more often than we are comfortable acknowledging, through the interaction of consciousness, imagination, and whatever else is out there or in here. If the world is confined in its possibilities, experience is boundless. As the old maps attest: there be dragons here. FT

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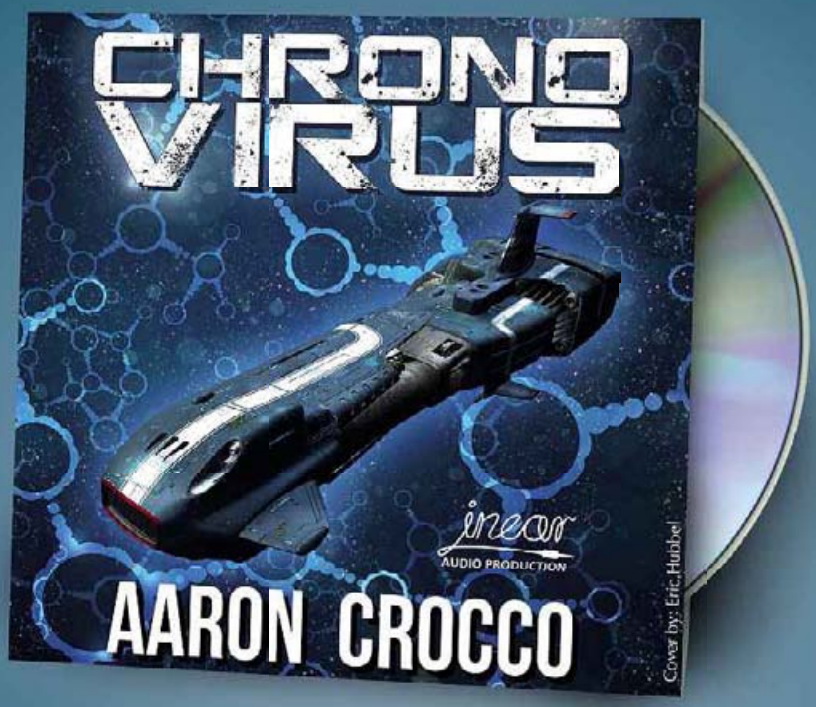

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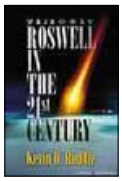
This month's books, films and games

reviews

Recanting Roswell certainty

A study of the New Mexico event is guaranteed to irritate those who believe wholeheartedly in a crashed UFO – and will get up the noses of the debunkers too…



Roswell in the 21st Century

The Evidence As It Exists Today

Kevin D Randle

Speaking Volumes 2016
Pb, 418pp, bib, $19.95, ISBN 9781628155136

"This book will annoy just about everyone," veteran Roswell-incident investigator-chronicler Kevin D Randle sighs. Indeed, if you subscribe to an unshakable belief concerning the object that plummeted from the sky onto the rural countryside north and west of Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947, *Roswell in the 21st Century* may be an argument to stay away from, especially if you have concerns about your blood pressure.

This is not just another Roswell book. There have already been too many, each selling the definitive solution (with rare exceptions, crashed spacecraft or weather balloon). Years ago, I gave up following that literature. In my later years, I find, the sensation of an insulted intelligence is one I do not care to indulge. Both proponents and debunkers have shown themselves to be adept at displaying just that.

Roswell in the 21st Century, which never insults one's intelligence, is noteworthy for being the first recantation by a major figure in the controversy, now nearing its fourth decade.

The episode has been known since it happened, but nobody made anything of it until the late 1970s. The first book on the subject was published in 1980. After that, the Roswell incident occupied much of ufology into the 1990s and spilled into popular culture. Even then, many ufologists remained sceptical, none more so than those engaged in reconstruction, through newly available government and military documents, of official UFO policy. Not so much as a hint of extraterrestrial wreckage and bodies could be discerned therein. Then again, official records immediately documenting the event itself, whose occurrence (while murky in its details) nobody denies, remain missing.

Few speak as authoritatively on the matter as Randle. The author or co-author of a number of Roswell-related books, he has travelled extensively, uncovering hundreds of informants and speaking with just about everyone with something to say, then seeking confirmation or disconfirmation of what he's heard.

His military background, which has proved uniquely valuable, provides him with insights into everything from the formats of official documents to the procedures employed in the handling of sensitive materials.

Randle was initially taken with what seemed to be credible testimonial evidence. Eventually (as I did), he grew doubtful of that evidence, especially as it concerned the supposed recovery of dead aliens. Of the eight claimants (he spoke directly with all) who said they had observed such bodies, Randle writes, "not one [..] turned out to be telling the truth".

That doesn't mean that all persons relating such stories are conscious liars, but the rest of the testimony arrives, at best, second-hand, sometimes from family members passing on what their deceased ex-military, Roswell 1947-based husbands and fathers alleged. Tellingly, no contemporary evidence links bodies to Roswell until decades later, after the event had sparked wide discussion in mass media.

> **"Even sincere accounts of dead aliens owe more to confabulation than to experience"**

In the absence of compelling reasons to conclude otherwise, even seemingly sincere accounts of dead aliens apparently owe more to confabulation than to experience.

On the other side, Randle skewers the claims of the late engineer Charles B Moore, prominent advocate for the notion that the Roswell material consisted of a balloon array with attached microphones, employed in a programme (code-named Mogul) to detect sound waves from potential Soviet atomic tests.

Though indisputably involved with Mogul, in the end Moore was just another unreliable witness, as Randle makes clear in a litany of Moore assertions flatly contradicted in project and weather records. Where Roswell storytellers are concerned, notices, fables and fabrications are not one side's exclusive property.

Moore's (and the Air Force's) yarns aside, it beggars belief that nobody at Roswell Army Air Field, home to the 509th Bombardment Group, trained – alone in its time – to deliver atomic weapons to the enemy, recognised a downed weather balloon, a sight familiar even to civilians in the region.

It was not a serious explanation in 1947, and it was not a serious one when revived (this time under the Mogul banner) by the Air Force in 1997. If personnel at Roswell had been so staggeringly incompetent as to confuse balloon materials with the remains of an advanced, potentially hostile foreign aircraft, it would have made for a notorious Cold War scandal.

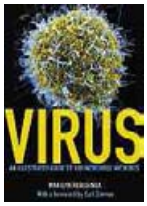
History would also have taken note of the US government's abrupt access, even if withheld from the citizenry, to somebody else's extraordinary technology. Actually, history would have changed in July 1947. If the event itself was covered up, its ripple (more like wave) effects would have washed over science, technology, defence policy, intelligence and industry. By 2016 many thousands of scientists and engineers would have examined the hardware in order to unlock its secrets and to apply them to earthly use. Nothing, however, points to anything like that.

Few Roswell proponents have any sense of the historical context in which an *ET*-generated event would have unfolded. Such question-begging led me, a lifelong student of history, to reject the proposition as exceedingly unlikely. Randle and I evolved, if separately, in the

Continued on page 56

Essential virus

The Earth needs viruses to continue, but some are just intracellular hoodlums



Virus

An Illustrated Guide to 101 Incredible Microbes

Marilyn Roossinck

Ivy Press 2016
Pb, 256pp, illus, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9781782403265

We tend to think of viruses as pathogens that cause deadly, debilitating infections such as flu, AIDS, polio, hepatitis C or the current *bête noire,* Zika. But only a handful of the thousands of viruses known to science cause human diseases. Indeed, viruses are everywhere: each millilitre of seawater contains about 10 million viruses, for example. A few viruses are beneficial, most are innocuous and almost all are, as this book shows, photogenic.

Viruses are wonderfully enigmatic. Biologists are not really sure if they are alive. And, as Roossinck notes in this accessible and well-illustrated book, biologists have struggled "to find a watertight definition" of what constitutes a virus since Martinus Beijerinck identified the first member (tobacco mosaic virus) in 1898.

Viruses hijack the cell's machinery to reproduce. Indeed, five to eight per cent of our genes seem to have come from retroviruses (the class that includes HIV), which our genomes collected over millions of years. And some viruses are incredibly contagious. Rotavirus A is the most common cause of childhood diarrhœa, for example. A gram of fæces from an infected person, Roossinck comments, contains up to 10 trillion Rotavirus A viral particles. Only 10 are needed to transmit the infection.

Even viruses that don't cause human illnesses can have devastating social, environment and economic consequences. Potato virus Y – which also infects peppers and tomatoes – is, Roossinck notes, a "serious concern" for farmers worldwide. The 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease remains a poignant remainder of our food supply's vulnerability to viral infections.

On the other hand, not all viruses are intracellular terrorists. Some are beneficial, at least if you're not a caterpillar or marine bacterium.

Cotesia congregata bracovirus aids wasps' ability to infect the caterpillars that incubate and form the food source for their offspring. The virus suppresses the caterpillar's immune system, which would otherwise destroy the wasp eggs.

Certain phages, viruses that infect and can kill some bacteria, may help us avoid the long-heralded antibiotic apocalypse and maintain the carbon balance in the sea. Without synechococcus phage syn5, the sea would be a "bacterial soup" devoid of other life. So, despite their reputation for being pathogens, viruses are essential for life on Earth.

As this book shows, viewed under an electron microscope viruses are often beautiful. Each of the 101 viruses has a full page portrait that helps you appreciate just how varied, photogenic and important these microbes are.

Roossinck, whose enthusiasm for virology is – if you'll pardon the pun – infectious, has penned an accessible, fascinating introduction that underscores the importance of these ubiquitous microbes.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

AN – AHEM! – INFECTIOUS READ ABOUT VERY HANDSOME VIRUSES **8**

Continued from previous page

same direction: initial sympathy, growing doubt, at last a virtual certainty that whatever took place in New Mexico nearly seven decades ago, a crashed spacecraft did not precipitate it. Nor, for that matter, did a weather balloon.

So what did happen? Here Randle, in conceding a truth so many avoid speaking, will infuriate believers on both sides. There is "no real answer," he says. Whatever it proves to be, I'm sure, the answer – presumably waiting in unrecovered official documents – will be interesting, likely surprising.

Meantime, if you're open to a rigorously objective analysis of the Roswell controversy by a supremely knowledgeable investigator with the rare integrity to change his mind, put *Roswell in the 21st Century* at the top of your reading list.

Jerome Clark

Fortean Times Verdict

THERE'S SOMETHING HERE TO ANNOY EVERYONE – A MUST-READ **9**

An Atheist in Heaven

The Ultimate Evidence for Life After Death?

Paul Davids & Gary E Schwartz

atheistinheaven.com 2016
HB, 511pp, illus, ind, $29.95, ISBN 9780989024242

Many of you may know of Forrest Ackerman (1916–2008), the pioneering American editor and collector who championed the comics, horror, SF and fantasy genres and who, during WWII, sent parcels of books and paper to UK science fiction fans. Many of these fans in turn sent copies of their fanzines for his collection and among these would have been the earliest records of the doings of the UK's 'first forteans'. Ackerman – or Forry, often transcribed as '4e' – is at the centre of this study of possible communications from the other side of death. He was a staunch atheist and once promised Davids, a filmmaker and protégé of Ackerman, that should he 'wake up' after dying to find he was mistaken about the matter, he would try to send messages back.

Davids is convinced that he began receiving (sometimes unexpectedly, and on occasion asked for) a series of 'messages' from Forry; these are mainly in the form of extraordinary 'coincidences' in which the coming together of strongly related information from different sources at a significant moment seems to defy chance and probability, including proof of Forry's identity. An addendum lists the key 142 incidents in chronological order.

Davids was introduced to neuro-psychiatrist Gary Schwartz (by Whitley Strieber's late wife), and together they began the work of collecting, verifying and documenting these incidents, including the mysterious obliteration of text in a document that had been unblemished moments before.

If nothing else, Davids's memoir of Forry, his collections, his influence on Hollywood and the genre publishing houses, and adoration by fans, is worth reading on its own.

This serves as a context for deciphering the synchronicity and meaningfulness of the messages, here logged in great detail (which includes chemical analysis of the strange blotted page). Running through this, Davids and Schwarz (both being sceptical also) discuss their attempts to understand what this means in terms of evidence for Forry's survival of death, and whether it could have any effect on the perpetual standoff between the Skeptics and the Believers.

This project, four years in the making, was summarised in Davids's filmed documentary *The Life After Death Project* (2013), in which arch-skeptic Dr Michael Shermer, founder of the Skeptics' Society, agreed to appear as a "token skeptic".

Shermer later described the project and his unexpected reaction to it in an article for *Scientific American* called 'Anomalous events that can shake one's scepticism to the core'. He also, in a personal message, praises Davids for his honesty and integrity regarding the evidence-gathering and analyses; and Davids himself provides a

notarised statement declaring that his evidence is authentic, which Schwartz is comfortable in endorsing.

So here it is, a slab of paper as thick as a government white paper, establishing the reality of apparent communication with a deceased person. Nevertheless, it makes for a good read, managing to both entertain and inform.

Whether it will stand alongside other historical case studies on post-mortem postings – such as the famous 'Cross Correspondences' apparently received from the deceased leaders of the SPR between 1901 and 1932 – remains to be seen; but it certainly deserves to be read and seriously considered.

Interestingly, this book is not published through a commercial publisher but by the authors themselves.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict
INTERESTING LOOK AT POST-MORTEM COMMUNICATION **8**

The Resonance of Unseen Things

Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny

Susan Lepselter

University of Michigan Press 2016
Pb, 192pp, notes, bib, ind, $27.95, ISBN 9780472052943

In *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny*, the cultural anthropologist Susan Lepselter offers readers an ethnographic meditation on what she calls the 'uncanny' persistence and cultural freight of UFO-related conspiracy theories in 20th century American culture.

This well researched 181 pages begin with her explanation that the study is neither a history of the UFO phenomenon in America nor a sociology of UFO believers or alien experiencers, but rather about an almost uniquely American poetics.

In the author's words, "this book is not about UFOs: rather it follows the recursion and resonance between uncanny memories, hauntings, conspiracy theories, captivity narratives, and tales of everyday life."

Lepselter, who has a literary background, is not concerned primarily with the veracity of the UFO stories and alien abduction accounts told to her, but instead how these stories – real or imagined – resonate with the everyday experiences of ordinary Americans of "class, loss, race, gender, and [..] a world of accelerated technological change." With their focus on the loss of liberty, captivity, as well as alien experimentation and biological exploitation of humans against their will, she appears to suggest that alien abduction experiences reflect the alienation and the 'uncanny' feeling among many Americans that something is very wrong with their society and the direction of their nation.

There are problems, however. The language can be too academic, making it difficult, sometimes, to fully understand Lepselter's conclusions.

Because of the obvious dangers of ridicule facing an academic discussing a topic as controversial as UFOs and conspiracy theories, Lepselter goes a bit too far with the language of disbelief. This would not be a problem were it not for her obvious fascination with tales of the fantastic. It is difficult to believe that anyone with such an in-depth knowledge of the subject does not take it more seriously than implied with phrases such as the "Once upon a time..." that starts the Roswell portion of the text.

While Lepselter's beliefs about legitimacy of the UFO phenomena are somewhat ambiguous, the text is a good introduction to the history of ufology and alien abduction studies, covering the written works of abduction authors such as the late Bud Hopkins and John Mack among other personalities in this otherworldly field.

For this reason the book will be enjoyable reading both for UFO enthusiasts researching the history of the field, as it will be for students of sociology.

Richard Thomas

Fortean Times Verdict
GOOD INTRO TO THE HISTORY OF UFOLOGY AND ABDUCTIONS **3**

By the yard

A transcribed 18th century Stonehenge survey is analysed in a mere 13 pages

Stonehenge 1740 AD

John Wood's 1740 survey and report transcribed and analysed on CAD

TW Flowers

CreateSpace 2016
Pb, 132pp, illus, £14.08, ISBN 9781515311232

In 1740, renowned architect John Wood the elder and his son John surveyed Stonehenge with an accuracy of 0.25in (6mm) in a manner that was "rude and simple such as my eyes delivered to the brain". Of this (the first accurate) survey and its significance for Stonehenge studies he said: "But leave every man the liberty of fancying as he pleases, when he hath sufficiently gazed upon the original". The 'original' are his plans, but it is equally true for the stones. So what fanciful liberties have been taken with Stonehenge and Wood's plans? Wood was not immune to the scholarship and intense patriotism of his time, for he believed that Somerset, or rather its Druids, were the source of all arcane knowledge instructing Pythagoras, Zoroaster and even Confucius and the 'Indian Hylobii' (sky-clad ascetics). They had four great centres: Wookey Hole and Priddy Circles in the Mendips; Stonehenge; and Avebury. They also showed great interest in Bath and its springs, and the stones of Stanton Drew. Indeed, Stonehenge "was copied from the like work" of "the temple of the moon at Stanton Drew", of which Wood had earlier produced plans. Much of this truth he demonstrated from the etymology of local place names and Greco-Roman writings and the general, early Georgian, imperial zeitgeist. Most of his writing, however, gives his methodology and results, and here Wood contrasts himself to the earlier Wessex monument pioneers Stuckely (who believed in the ancient cubit – 26.8in (68cm) – and massaged his recording of Stonehenge to fit that measure) and Inigo Jones, who liked geometric exactitude and had difficulty in counting the stones.

Flowers has not only produced a transcription of Wood's words and plans (112 pages) but has returned to the Stuckelian idea of a universal measure of length, though this time, Thom's Megalithic yard of 32.664in (83cm). (Other megalithic yards are available.) He has taken Wood's measurements, converted them (often to seven decimal places!) and replotted them to find new alignments and so solve for all time the true secret of Stonehenge (the second time this year it has been solved) in just 13 pages and the front and back covers. Sadly, it is often not possible to see the Wood for the threes... and fives and sevens etc.

For Flowers, picking his numbers carefully, the "winter solstice alignment is rejected as an archæological red herring" in favour of the summer solstice sunlight being blocked and amplified by sarsens and bluestones. The reasoning for this solar entrapment is not illuminated: is it to allow the mica of the Altar Stone to reflect the sunlight back to the heavens, as others have suggested? Perhaps. Which is the more appealing fantasy: an original, solid Georgian Wooden rule or a newer, computer-generated, plastic Flowers' arrangement? Best tell the Hylobii to wrap up warm for the solstice celebrations.

Rob Ixer

Fortean Times Verdict
REINTERPRETING A SEMINAL 1740 TEXT ON STONEHENGE **7**

New Atlantis in sound

The Radiophonic Workshop was only the best known of many innovative electronic music-making outfits in post-war Britain

Tape Leaders

A Compendium of Early British Electronic Music Composers

Ian Helliwell

Sound on Sound 2016
Hb, 220pp + 15 track CD, £29, ISBN 9780995495807

We Have Also Sound-Houses – a 1979 documentary on the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop – noted that the workshop's manipulated sound became synonymous with the otherworldly, the nightmarish and "misplaced sanity".

This was not the original vision of the Workshop's co-founder, Daphne Oram, who around the time of its opening in 1958, pinned to its door the prescient passage from Sir Francis Bacon's 1624 *New Atlantis*: "We have also Sound-houses, where we practise and demonstrate all Sounds and their Generation…" Oram had wanted to establish a British electronic music studio comparable to the French RTF and German WDR studios, but when it became clear that the Radiophonic Workshop would merely provide material for the BBC's drama department, Oram quit, resolving to set up her own 'sound house'.

As if to rub salt in the wound, the Workshop's 1963 monograph co-opted her Bacon quote, quipping: "It would be nice to think that [Bacon's] flight into fancy on the subject of sound was motivated by ideas of creating the incidental sounds to illustrate the works of his contemporary, Shakespeare, for it is precisely for this purpose, viz. the special effects for radio drama, that this modern version of Bacon's Sound-house was created."

Until now, the Radiophonic Workshop has somewhat eclipsed other players in British early electronic music's history. The extent of this is laid bare in the revelatory book *Tape Leaders* – a landmark survey by the composer, film-maker, instrument-builder and researcher Ian Helliwell, who has uncovered hitherto unacknowledged independent electronic music composers with sound-houses and using tape machines and electronic techniques much as Oram originally imagined.

Tape Leaders is an A-to-Z of electronic music composers in Britain, focusing on the early pioneers. It features well-known figures such as Joe Meek, Delia Derbyshire, Brian Eno, William Burroughs (who dabbled with tape cut-ups at Paul McCartney's London studio in the 1960s) and, of course, Oram (whose 1972 metaphysical book *An Individual Note of Music, Sound and Electronics* will be reprinted later this year).

Helliwell scores every name with a 'Commitment Factor' (Oram scores 10/10), and an 'Obscurity Quotient'. At the extremes of the Obscurity Quotient, we find Janet Beat (whose early œuvre was destroyed in a flood), Brian Whibley and Ralph Broome, both of whose archives were dispersed when they died.

Other early works have been lost, but Helliwell, whose own Commitment Factor must rank a solid 10, has tracked down recordings languishing on the brink of oblivion, many of which feature on the accompanying CD, all displaying a level of sophistication seemingly at odds with the limited means then available.

The life stories Helliwell has gathered show a culture of electronic music-making distinct from that of France and Germany. The British school (if you can call it that) was characterised by individuals toiling with tape-splicers in almost complete seclusion and often eccentric and downtrodden.

One wonders whether such states are a prerequisite to enjoying experimental music, or if they are gradually instilled from without through a wider apathy towards such pursuits. A quote from inventor/engineer/composer F C Judd (the subject of Helliwell's 2011 film *Practical Electronica*) encapsulates the stoicism that seemed widespread: "The composer of electronic music or *musique concrète* has little need to offer justification of his work. He can regard it as an experiment in an unexplored field, and can supply musical motive by pointing to the fascination of creating new sounds."

For anybody interested in modern music (and the modernist condition), *Tape Leaders* is essential reading. It is a monumental feat of research. Illustrated throughout with rare ephemera, it conjures an awe-inspiring sense of a parallel universe: what would our musical landscape look like today if experimental sound practices had been more widely assimilated?

Helliwell was responsible for one of the highlights of the Science Museum's Alternative Histories of Electronic Music conference earlier this year, giving a satisfyingly damning appraisal of academe's habitual disregard of outsiders.

The fact that *Tape Leaders* appears at this time of growing interest in post-war electronic music underlines the truism that composers' works are only properly appreciated after they're gone.

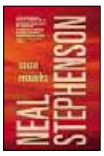
Daniel Wilson

Fortean Times Verdict
A VERY BRITISH TAKE ON POST-WAR ELECTRONIC MUSIC **8**

Some Remarks

Neal Stephenson

William Morrow Paperbacks 2014
Pb, 336 pp, $15.99. ISBN 9780062024442



Some ask: where are the flying cars? Stephenson asks: Where's my donut-shaped space station? Where's my ticket to Mars?

Some Remarks gathers journalism, meditations, interviews and a short story. In articles written 1993–2012, Stephenson muses on the development of rocketry in 'Locked in'; on early e-money in 'The Great Simoleon Caper'; and on academic snobbery in 'Everything' and 'More Foreword'.

In 'The Salon Interview' (2004), he expands on the historical background to *The System of the World*, the quarrels between Newton and Leibniz, the development of Calculus Puritanism, the reconciliation of science, religion and alchemy by Leibniz, Newton and other savants of their time, and the links between *System* and *Cryptonomicon*. Perhaps of equal importance is how the *System* novels turn the birth of modern banking into entertainment! Some of the same territory is covered and updated to the 21st century in 'Metaphysics in the Royal Society 1715–2010'. 'Mother Earth, Mother Board', a 118-page book within a book, collects Stephenson's Hacker Tourist articles on undersea telecommunications cable-laying in the 1990s. Introducing divers, the engineers who call themselves cable trash, it provides a history of the art. And Art it is, as every hill, dip, and shallow has to be taken into account. Read how Lord Kelvin invented the mirror galvanometer, a new improved compass and a depth sounder, making a fortune from each. While some of the material is dated, it covers Stephenson's development as an SF writer and growing to adulthood of the World Wide Web.

Páiric Ó Corráin

Fortean Times Verdict
THROWS A FASCINATING LIGHT ON A SF GREAT'S DEVELOPMENT **8**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a selection of recent fortean books...

Our Old Monsters

Witches, Werewolves and Vampires from Medieval Theology to Horror Cinema

Brenda S Gardenour Walter

McFarland 2015

PB, 241pp, illus, notes, filmography, bib, ind, £36.95, ISBN 9780786476800

Brenda Walter, a professor at the Saint Louis College of Pharmacy, researches the history of medicine, Aristotelian discourse and "the influence of medieval otherness on the horror genre".

The focus of her study are the 'usual suspects': the witch, the vampire and the werewolf, which she traces back to the Aristotelian parsing of natural science in mediæval European universities. The ethereal world beyond the Moon was warm, light, male and good; below, the Moon was evil, cold, dark, female and imperfect. In time, these warped philosophies – embroidered here with a wealth of fascinating historical footnotes – became a sort of 'theological' basis for anti-semitism and misogyny, nowhere better demonstrated, she argues, than in the fate of our unholy trio in modern horror movies.

Walter attributes their enduring popularity to the subtle fact that "despite their seeming 'otherness', they are painfully and beautifully human." She adds that: "even in their wretched state they, like us, might still be redeemed through salvific human love."

Walter's academic tone is subdued by her light touch and in no way interferes with the enjoyment of her thesis, possibly aided by many familiar contemporary references, typified by a memorable dissection of the teen female-werewolf movie *Ginger Snaps* (2000).

Christ's Samurai

The True Story of the Shimabara Rebellion

Jonathan Clements

Robinson /Little Brown 2016.

Pb, 265pp, maps, notes, bib, ind, £14.99, ISBN 9781472137418

All but forgotten in the West, but still referenced by Japanese culture (including manga and movies) despite being a taboo subject for some of the time, is the story of the four-month Shimabara Rebellion that began in December 1637. Briefly, in the mid-1630s, the two ruling lords (of the Shimabara and Karatsu Domains) in this southwestern part of Japan's Nagasaki Prefecture, imposed extremely heavy taxes on their subjects. This and a famine caused many masterless samurai (retainers from previous ruling families ordered to leave their fiefs) to join the peasantry in plotting a rebellion.

A third impetus was the official crackdown on Christian Catholics. (The Arima clan, former rulers of Shimabara, had allowed Christianity to flourish, before they were replaced by the Matsukura clan).

This triple whammy backfired in December 1637, when tens of thousands besieged several castles in the region. A few successes against the clan armies (who were joined by contingents from other regional domains by order of the shogunate), were quickly followed by a succession of routs.

What lifts this out of history's miserable catalogue of crushed religious groups is the extraordinary mythology that formed around the figurehead of the Shimabara rebellion – a 16-year-old boy called Jerome Amakusa Shiro – amplified by a superstitious fear among the oppressors.

Jonathan Clement's thrilling account, supported by detailed fieldwork and archival research, shows that the rebels were seen variously as tax rebels and as a doomsday cult led by a boy sorcerer.

When the farmers bested trained samurai in combat, the victors believed they had the blessings of an alien god and prophesied that fires in the sky would bring about the end of the world. Clements writes: "The sect was said to harbour dark designs to overthrow the government. Its teachers used a dead language that was impenetrable to all but the innermost circle of believers. Its priests preached love and kindness but helped local warlords acquire firearms. They encouraged believers to cast aside their earthly allegiances and swear loyalty to a foreign god-emperor before seeking terrible martyrdoms."

When the rebels' last stand at the old castles of Hara fell, the end of their world came true on 15 April, and 37,000 rebels and sympathisers were beheaded by the shogunate, adding to the thousands killed up to this point. The rebellion was a disaster for the many towns and villages in the region left without a population; consequently, the leader of the Matsukura clan was also beheaded for the crime of misrule. The judgement of time, though, is stymied; Catholic historians reject any claims to martyrdom for Jerome and his followers because their motive was not purely a defence of the Faith; and historians draw back from calling this a 'peasant revolt' because of the involvement of the *ronin* and retainers of banished clans and, of course, the role of a foreign religion.

This is history writing at its best.

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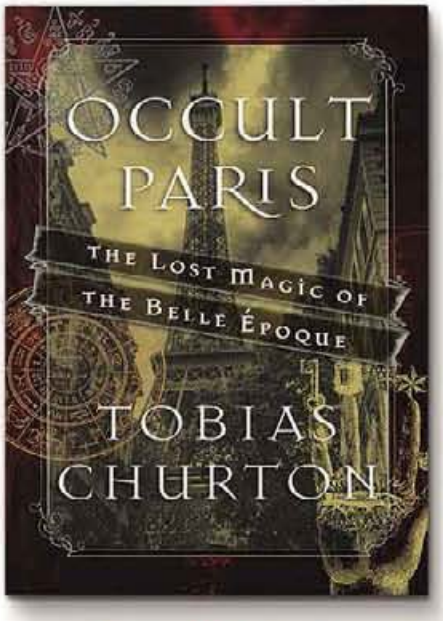

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Train to Busan

Dir Yeon Sang-ho, South Korea 2016

On UK release from 28 October

Arriving at a platform near you shortly is this hot ticket from South Korea, which has apparently broken all sorts of box office records in the East. The central character, Seok-woo (Yoo Gong), is a self-absorbed divorcee who, having missed his young daughter Soo-an's school recital and bought her a Wii for the second birthday running, is shamed into agreeing to take her to visit her mother in Busan. Unfortunately, also along for the ride is a young woman infected with what can only be described as a zombie virus – one that has soon spread throughout the train.

If you're Simon Pegg, you should look away now – because these are not zombies for the purist: they are lightning-fast (as in Zack Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* remake), their bite is almost instantly contagious (as in *28 Days Later*), and they flock together in massive numbers (as in *World War Z*).

From all this you might surmise that *Train to Busan* is something of a rehash of the last 15 or so years' worth of zombie movies for the benefit of a market that might not yet have seen all the originals. That is certainly how it comes across, and consequently it may find wowing Western audiences a tougher task, accustomed as we are to high-quality offerings such as *The Walking Dead* and *Les Revenants*.

At times, *Train to Busan* feels more like a good old-fashioned disaster movie than a horror film: the characterisation is pretty thin and the sentimentality pretty thick; despite perilous situations galore, it isn't remotely frightening; and despite having a body count in what must be the hundreds, if not thousands, it is remarkably bloodless.

I don't want to give the impression that this is a bad film, because it isn't. There are some impressive set pieces, the occasional moment of wit and insight, and two or three engaging performances. The tension is handled well, and if nothing else the film works fine as a thriller. But as a zombie movie, I'm afraid it has arrived about 10 years late.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict
WE WILL SHORTLY ARRIVE AT DISAPPOINTMENT PARKWAY **5**

Personal Shopper

Dir. Olivier Assayas, France 2016

On UK release from 28 October

Maureen (Kristen Stewart) is personal shopper for demanding, mega-famous, trend-setting celebrity Kyra (Nora van Waldstatten). Dashing around Paris and London, choosing and collecting clothes and accessories, Maureen is the de facto stand-in for her client, employed because she knows Kira's taste and how to make her look good. But Maureen is dissatisfied, not just with her job but with her life; she is mourning the death of her twin brother who passed away some weeks before from a heart condition. Like him, Maureen reckons herself to be a medium, a spiritualist in touch with a world beyond our own. Holding to a pact made with her brother, Maureen is waiting for a sign from him to prove there is life after death.

Assayas presents for our consideration a series of dualities: haves and have-nots, on the most basic level; personal and public; sophistication and naiveté; body and soul; and the biggie – life and death. They are presented through visual oppositions: swanky penthouse flat versus old dark house; city versus country; fashionable versus scuzzy; and, ultimately, clothed versus naked. All of this is bundled together in a package that is itself a clash between two film genres: glossy thriller and gothic horror. These contrasts are pulled together with skill, and the opposites meld into each other rather than jarring.

An intriguing æsthetic then, and in service to an equally intriguing structure; however, the film has some serious flaws which conspire to render it a failure. Foremost among these is Kristen Stewart's performance as Maureen. Stewart has undeniable star quality, but at this stage of her career she simply does not have the acting chops to carry a film, particularly one as intense as this, without heavyweight support to help her out. Maureen is at best a rootless character, at worst someone who is losing her mind, but Stewart plays it all with the same collection of shrugs, stammers and furrowed brows. For a film that rarely has her off screen, it's a fatal flaw. The dialogue is often banal and on occasion risible; describing her encounter with a malign female apparition, Maureen says: "She vomited some ectoplasm and left." There is a lengthy, crucial section of the film where Maureen is plagued by text messages, which may or may not be coming from the beyond. Technology means that sequences like this are perforce creeping into cinema, but sending and receiving texts is hardly cinematic stuff.

There are moments when Assayas's skill as a technician shines through: such as when Maureen's inbox fills with messages, each of which indicates her stalker is getting closer and closer, and a remarkable glide out of a hotel elevator, through the lobby and out into the street. Both sequences recall Hitchcock at his best, and I imagine he would have had a field day with this material. Sadly, such moments are too infrequent to rescue the film; the idea might have been to set up an opposition between 21st century thriller and 19th century Gothic chiller, but this offers little of either.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict
MORE LIKE RATNERS THAN CARTIER UNFORTUNATELY **6**

From Dusk Till Dawn: Season Two

Dir Robert Rodriguez, US 2016
Entertainment One, £19.99 (DVD)

What I actually liked about Season One of the Robert Rodriguez-produced *From Dusk Till Dawn* TV series – based on his own bloody 1996 crime/horror genre splice starring Quentin Tarantino and George Clooney as the notorious Gecko brothers – was seeing how it stuck to or departed from the original. There was also an element of sophistication in the flashback narrative interplay that fleshed out, in particular, the background of Jessie Garcia's Texas Ranger Freddie Gonzalez and his relationship with his mentor (Don Johnson). Finding out what fuelled Freddie's path of revenge worked well for me, although I was less interested in the background of Santanico Pandemonium, Salma Hayek's Titty Twister dancer (here played with a vampirish pout by Eiza González), which is partly what makes Season Two a problem for me.

Basically, it goes all *True Blood* on us, concerned with factional infighting between vampires, with some Mesoamerican mythology and gruesome Grindhouse elements bunged in for good measure. Santanico, in alliance with Richie Gecko, plots her revenge against the blood cult in the aftermath of the previous season's climax; 500-year-old Vampire Queen, yet slave to the darkness, she really wants to be done with it. Meanwhile, estranged from Richie, Seth has become a drug addict, nursed by Kate Fuller, who is on a quest to rescue her brother from the thralls of the cult. Ranger Freddie has his own quest: heir of an ancient warrior race, he seeks to eradicate the vampire threat wherever he finds it.

There is plenty of bloodletting and carnage throughout, but the 'what happens next?' scenario is replete with nasty villains and anti-heroes I found it increasingly hard to care about. You might be of a mind that Richie Gecko is a character we can actually root for, and that a man who cuts out the eyes of an innocent woman and then butchers her is all part of the off-kilter, morally subversive fun of the series; and perhaps you'll enjoy the vampire in-fighting as an exercise in nasty one-upmanship. If so, then Season Two is for you. However, much of the slow-burn inevitability of an almighty confrontation at the Titty Twister crossroads of Season One is absent in Season Two. While the cast play their parts with gusto, it's all – like the Gecko brothers themselves – hard to love. Plenty do love it though: a third season is on the way.
Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict
SADLY, SOMETHING OF A MISSED OPPORTUNITY **6**

Arcadia

Dir Tod Williams, US 2016
Signature Entertainment, £19.99 (Blu-ray), £15.99 (DVD)

In a dystopian near-future, life expectancy is just 39 years due to an incurable virus – incurable, that is, unless you're one of the elite who live in Arcadia, a luxurious skyscraper. A government operative, lured by the prospect of free passage, is sent to neutralise a terrorist organisation who may have found a cure of their own.

Arcadia is an impressive British sci-fi thriller which works better than Ben Wheatley's recent *High Rise* despite having only a fraction of the budget. As a sci-fi film it's a mild swizz because there's actually very little hard SF in it; but you have to cut it some slack, as dazzling FX are just not a possibility at this level. What you do get though is a masterful control of narrative, pace and tension: very few of the main characters meet in person and the shoot was quite plainly done in discrete chunks, so there's real skill involved in cutting it together to create drama. The other interesting thing is that it's so overtly political; it even advocates direct action as potentially the only solution to society's ever-widening inequality. The acting is way above average for a low budget genre movie, particularly the charismatic and grizzled Marc Baylis, and the script is pretty good too. The seams show occasionally of course but that's to be expected. Director Tom Large is one to watch; it'll be interesting to see if he gets more money to play with on future projects and how he handles it if he does. For now though, *Arcadia* is a little gem of a thriller with plenty to say.
Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict
LOW-BUDGET SF THRILLER PUNCHES ABOVE ITS WEIGHT **8**

SHORTS

CELL

Signature Entertainment, £15.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

In a stroke of *Day of the Triffids*-style luck, John Cusack's cell phone runs out of battery just as everyone else's gets zapped by a signal that turns them into spasming psychos. Despite some crummy twitching/acting from the extras, it's a pretty thrilling and brutal scene. Soon, though, we're firmly in familiar 'apocalyptic road movie' territory. There are some inspired moments, like when the 'phoners' open their mouths and tinny music comes out, and a scene in a bar where the Jukebox plays the disco classic 'Ring My Bell.' Yet, there's a problem: the film feels like it was made when the novel was written: 10 years ago. Maybe it's the ropey CGI. Maybe it's the glut of zombie movies that have turned these stories into clichés. Or maybe it's that mobile phones feel too old and established to be that much of a threat. Yes, there's a still relevant message about how our little screens can turn us into mindless drones, and this would have been a kick-ass movie if it had been made 15 years ago and with a bigger budget. But in 2016, it feels like too little too late. I dug the ending though, which reminded me of King's recent Lovecraftian novel *Revival*. **Rev Peter Laws** 5/10

CREATURE DESIGNERS: THE FRANKENSTEIN COMPLEX

Studiocanal, £12.99 (DVD)

This is an entertaining film about the men (and it is chiefly men) who design and build the monsters from our favourite movies. There have been an awful lot of these documentaries over the last few years, so finding anything new to say is the real challenge. Directors Gilles Penso and Alexandre Poncet, they of the *Ray Harryhausen: Special Effects Titan* from a few years back, manage to do so, but not in the manner you'd expect. Seeing the monsters again is, of course, a treat, and makes you want to revisit the original movies; but what is most fascinating about this film is how it reveals the sadness and bitterness felt by many in the industry, in particular an apocalyptically grumpy Phil Tippett, as a result of the rise to dominance of CGI. Given that everybody – and I mean everybody who's asked the question – says they prefer models to CGI you're left scratching your head as to how this state of affairs has come about. But then someone mentions the studio executives and how smaller budgets and tighter schedules now demand that all effects shots are done separately from the first unit work: in other words, the monster makers were defeated by the men in suits. **DK** 7/10

DEAD END DRIVE-IN

Arrow Video, £15.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

This 1986 Ozploitation classic sees young people incarcerated at the local drive-in. They think they're having fun, but these places are actually the youth prisons of a dystopian future. One kid, a skinny guy who is eager to 'bulk up' and get as ripped as his brother, winds up inside and seems to be the only person who realises that what's on offer is confinement rather than recreation. There are some cool stunts, amusingly odd dialogue and typically quirky fashions. I'm not the biggest fan of 80s punk, though, so some of the film's charms were lost on me. Still, as a sort of heady cocktail of *Mad Max*, *Escape from New York* and *Night of the Comet*, it's pretty enjoyable. **Rev PL** 6/10

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HOW WE WERE MADE

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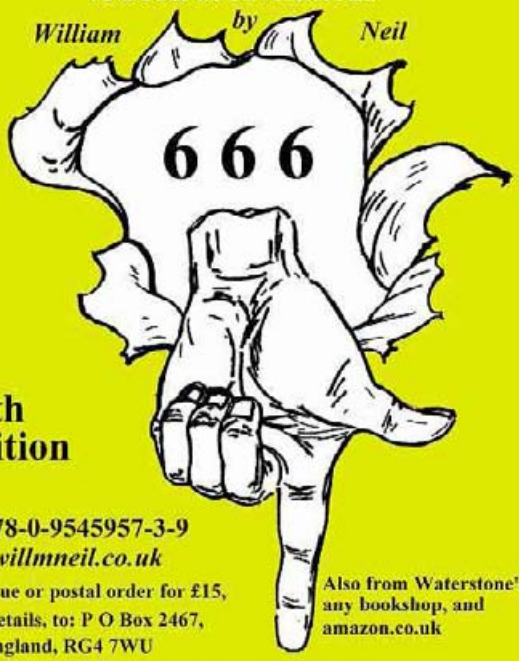

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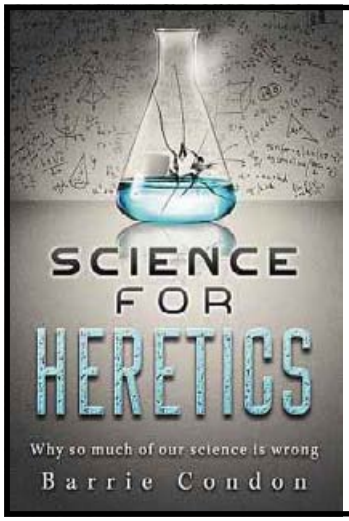

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Consequently the foundation for an old planet and therefore radiometric dating is wrong. Sand has come from our missing landscapes, from places like the Grand Canyon and the Great Butts of Arizona, removed when the forming limestone was still soft and mud-like.

The steep sides of these canyons and gorges tell us how the pyramids were built and knowing how the pyramids were built tells yet another story, a story quite opposed to evolution. It seems circumstances prevailed that took mankind on a course down to animal rather than the other way around.

But is RT right? Only a closer inspection of the humble beach pebble will call for a geological recount.

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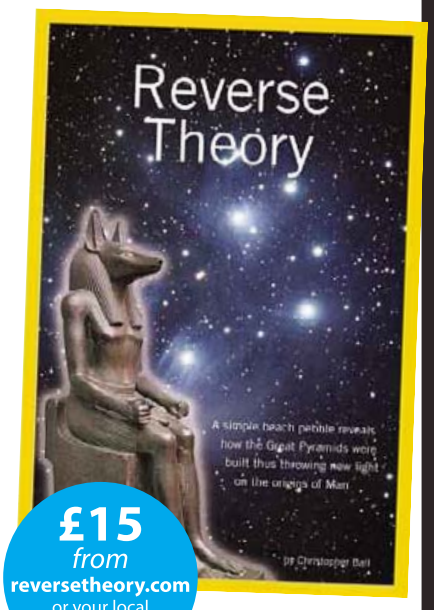
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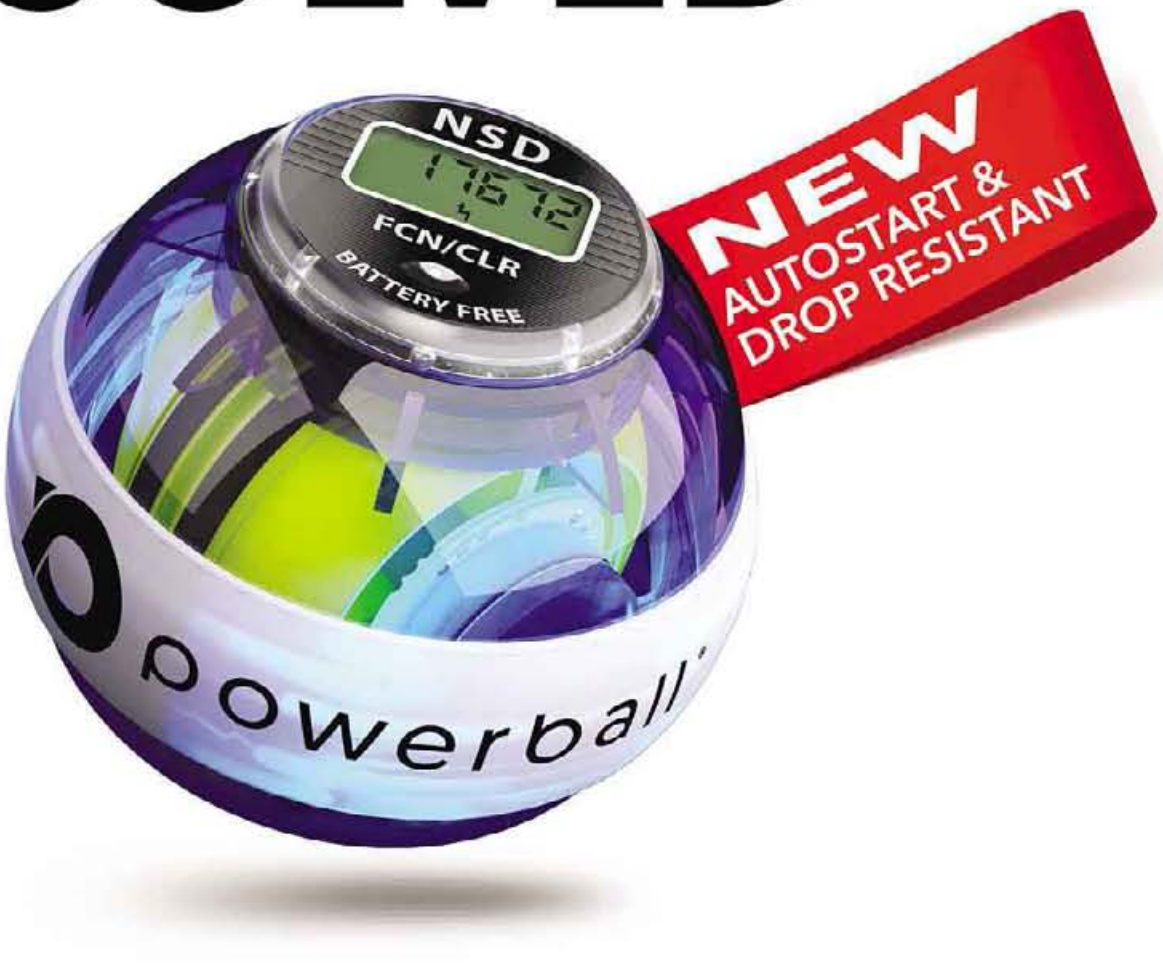

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Dear FT...

letters

A talking bucket

My grandfather Eric Hurst was born in Surrey in 1912. From an early age he took a passionate interest in the emerging medium of radio and by the age of 12 he had built a four-valve wireless complete with huge gramophone horn. It was the first radio in the tiny six-house hamlet of Ede's Fields. The old folk around about used to call it a "trey-valved 'arkner-in", because it had three valves and you "harkened-in" to it. When my grandfather joined the RAF in World War II, he wanted to be a pilot, but this was refused on the grounds that he was far more valuable as a radio technician.

As the war progressed, he worked at Bletchley Park. He later told my father the following story. Somewhere near London, in a wooded place, there was a secret transmitter, possibly used to send messages on strong experimental frequencies. One day a local man, with no knowledge of the transmitter, was out with a bucket collecting coal for the fire. After filling it up, he headed back. Suddenly a voice boomed out of the bucket, giving the man the fright of his life. He ran off without the haunted pail! I had thought that it was water in the pail, and that my grandfather had explained how the arc of the water and the metal bucket had acted as a kind of primitive receiver. My father remembers it as coal, and has pointed out how the crystals found in coal can be used as a kind of 'cat's whisker', to pick up signals in a simple radio set. I am no electronics expert, and suspect that this could be radio technician's folklore. Have any other readers heard the like of this story?

Lewis JW Hurst
Tokyo

Nessie's identity

Regarding possible candidates for the mysterious inhabitant of Loch Ness for which Greg May suggests various marine creatures [**FT344:70**]: a problem any such creature would face would be the difficulty of passing through the various locks on the Caledonian Canal. From the eastern end of the canal to Loch Ness there are six locks to negotiate, while from the western end there are no fewer than 23. One can possibly imagine a seal or even a dolphin making its way through one lock (are there any examples elsewhere?), but managing to get through a minimum of six seems highly unlikely. As for a basking shark, I doubt that it could either pass through a lock without attracting attention or, indeed, survive for long in fresh water.

Dr P G Swindells
Wolverhampton, West Midlands

Simulacra corner

Sean Cooke found this stone on Seaford beach in Sussex. He said: "When I turned it over, I was stunned to see the face of a black cat staring at me."

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to **PO BOX 2409 LONDON NW5 4NP** or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.*

Vietnam and the Iceman

With reference to your book review concerning the Minnesota Iceman [**FT343:59**]: a couple of years ago I published an article on this subject in a magazine. Your account mentions the Iceman appearing in the USA, when previously last seen in Hong Kong. My research showed that Frank Hansen served with the USAF at Da Nang, a major staging post in Vietnam, one of several areas where manimals had been previously reported. From Da Nang the bodies of American war dead were shipped back home; but the body bags were sometimes used to carry less worthwhile cargo; a rather obvious method of transporting something other than that intended, but certainly possible. It was suggested that Hansen could have smuggled the Iceman into the US in this way.

A 1966 report adds further 'evidence'; Jim Lucas, a New York war correspondent, stated that US Marines had shot not only tigers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam but also 'a large ape'. Officially, there are no apes indigenous to that part of Southeast Asia. An Australian journalist earlier wrote of a 'large primate' having been found in a cave there in 1944. That's it, I'm afraid; as usual, tantalising, tenuous and unverifiable – but that seems to be the way these things go!

Shaun Ivory
Redcar, North Yorkshire

Not disappointing

I am not sure that MG Sherlock [**FT343:73**] was reading the same Jenny Randles's column [**FT340:28-29**] that I was. I got the distinct impression that Jenny had given at least a glimmer of credence to the pivotal Burroughs and Penniston account of a highly advanced, structured craft manœuvring in the forest. If I have got this right, then her conclusions were not "disappointing" – unless of course one is desperate for a non-exotic explanation. As this incident is now getting on for 40 years old and nothing remotely like the Burroughs/Penniston craft has emerged from Skunkworks or the former Soviet Union, then I think it is not going too far to suggest that it may just have been an extra-terrestrial/dimensional (alien) vehicle. At the very least, we can now finally lay to rest the fatuous lighthouse/lightship explanations, so beloved of the debunking fraternity. Col. Halt is on record as saying that he was aware of the lighthouse and that the effects it produced were not remotely like what he saw in the forest. A recent book by Nick Pope discusses Burroughs and Penniston's experiences in detail.

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands

The one and only

In "The Enchanted Isle" [**FT343:32**], Roger Clarke makes passing mention of Tennyson "striding the hills [of the Isle of Wight] as he composed *Idylls of a King*". The Tennyson work is of course *Idylls of the King* – and while the correction may seem pedantic, I suspect King Arthur and his followers would want to insist on his deserving of the definite article.

Dennis Lien
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Chinese ancestry

A more plausible version of Hei Sing Tso's data-free theory about Chinese descent from alien giants and Nephilim [**FT342:74, 343:71**] was published 70 years ago by Franz Weidenreich (1873-1948) and GHR von Koenigswald (1902-82), and was followed up in the 1950s by the Chinese authorities. "[Weidenreich] had noticed that smaller breeds of dog often have relatively large brains and small

letters

faces compared with larger ones. Humans also have much larger brains and relatively smaller faces than chimps, gorillas and orang-utans, something that had puzzled researchers for years. Weidenreich believed it all made sense if our family tree included some unusually large ancestors. As the millennia passed, our bodies shrank but our brains remained large. In other words, we were descended from Asian giants, and Gigantopithecus was one of them." (*New Scientist*, 18 May 2016).

Of course, the current thinking is that Gigantopithecus is much more distantly related to modern humans, but that some populations of Chinese people owe some of their DNA to other hominids, Denisovans – or possibly Red Deer Cave people – as well as the Neanderthal genes that Europeans and Eurasians carry. This is complicated by the lack of Neanderthal Y chromosomes in our DNA, probably due to rape and pillage. The Denisovan DNA was only discovered in 2010, and has now been identified in people from Papua New Guinea to Inuit Greenland. The traditional view of Neanderthals as uncultured victims of our species' ingenuity is also crumbling under the weight of evidence of their funerary rites, ability to articulate and so on. It seems very few of us can claim to be pure *Homo sapiens*.

Georgina Skipper
Weymouth, Dorset

Journalism's decline

There's a reason why, as Paul Sieveking notes [**FT334:20-25**] there are fewer UK big cat reports in recent years in the local and national press: the press, especially the local press, has itself been greatly diminished. There's less media left around to do the reporting. Take a flick through your newspaper – if your community still even has one – and it's surprisingly hard to find email contact details for 'Editorial' for its journalists, let alone a phone number. In the part of the UK where I live and where I gather big cat reports – the county of Suffolk – one in six people have still never been on the Internet (assuming you can get wifi or even mobile coverage out in the middle of nowhere), so a lot of people just aren't going to email in their big cat sightings to what's left of the local press, ever. If you've ever tried phoning your local paper with a story after 5pm on a weekday it ain't easy; expect a voicemail at best. The local press is less a part of people's lives that it used to be. There are fewer journalists trying to do the same job and there are fewer actual pages in local newspapers. Close examination of some recent big cat reports shows that these break in the national press and then are picked up by the (much more poorly resourced) local press later, not the other way round.

There are notable exceptions – *Bury Free Press* and the *Haverhill Echo* in particular do a fine job of reporting local big cat sightings, while the Freedom of Information Act now makes it easier for journalists to come up with big cat stories based on police call logs and local council data on Dangerous Wild Animal licensing and recorded animal escapes.

The Internet and social media haven't sustained a viable alternative point of contact for reporting big cats either. Back in the heyday of British big cats, in the late 20th century, a handful of enthusiastic big cat investigation groups set up websites for effective reporting of ABC sightings, back in the days of running a membership organisation with a physical newsletter for which you could charge membership subscriptions. The Internet pioneers of big cat reporting eventually found out what a drag it was to operate such websites – for free, as it turned out. Many of the big cat investigation sites of old are a bit static now, with the latest news items being a couple of years old. There have also been fallings-out among big cat investigation groups over the years.

Other big cat investigation groups avoid contact with the media; who can blame them when even serious reports on big cats in Britain are marginalised by national newspapers to the "Weird News" ghetto?

I appreciate that the "Where are the bodies?" argument presents a real problem for UK big cat investigators. But people also have short memories – no one remembers the May 2012 *Daily Mirror* report of the discovery of what appeared to be the rotting corpse of a young adult or older cub black leopard discovered in Morayshire, Scotland, with photos. (http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/big-cat-remains-found-by-dog-839016).

About 18 months into my investigations of big cat sightings in Suffolk, I began to find that random people I'd known locally for a while had either seen a big cat themselves, or had a family member or friend who'd seen one locally. In the village of Westleton, not far from the Suffolk coast and near where I live, I found that having seen a big cat wasn't even that unusual. East Anglia has a strong tradition of keeping things to oneself. Farmers in particular are aware that their neighbours are often heavily armed, often with both a shotgun license and a Firearms Certificate to own a rifle, so they sometimes keep quiet about a big cat they've seen so that it's not shot by one of their neighbours. I heard a rumour from North Norfolk that a black leopard had been shot in 2012. I thought nothing of it until I noticed that the sightings of black leopards in the adjoining county of Suffolk and along the Norfolk-Suffolk border seemed to nosedive soon afterwards, with suddenly a lot more pumas seen in Suffolk instead, as if the competition has suddenly been eliminated.

The figure of 80 to 90 per cent black leopards among UK big cat sightings that Paul mentions isn't one I recognise. Rick Minter, author of *Big Cats: Facing Britain's Wild Predator* (reviewed **FT289:58**), estimates that in any given local sample within the UK, reports will be a couple of per cent lynxes, around 75 per cent black (melanistic) leopards and the remainder sandy-coloured pumas. The Suffolk sample – more than 150 sightings over 40 years – seems to have proportionally slightly more pumas than the national average, with slightly fewer black leopards. Pumas are generally more common than black leopards in the west of the county, with black leopard sightings more frequent in the east nearer the coast, although there are habitats (especially wetlands and water meadows by the rivers) that seem to attract both leopards and pumas, as well as lynxes.

A couple of years ago I was getting reports almost exclusively of pumas, but now it seems at least one black leopard is back. It's all in *Mystery Animals of the British Isles: Suffolk*, to be published imminently by CFZ Publishing, and meanwhile at http://twitter.com/mysteryanimals.

I think the November 2014 sighting of "two sandy coloured ABCs" at Long Melford, Suffolk, in your report may have become garbled. *Cambridge News* reported that the witness came from the Long Melford area, on the Essex border (she's known to me, and wisely decided to be vague about where she lived when reporting her sighting to the press, in a part of the world where everybody knows everybody). But her sighting itself was in Red Lodge, way over to the northwest and right on the Cambridgeshire border.

Matt Salusbury
Dunwich, Suffolk

"Ground control?
I meant to eject the CD"

CAROL ISAACS

Chipperfield legend

I read with interest the feature on ABCs [**FT344:20-25**], but I must take exception to the suggestion that Mary Chipperfield either deliberately, or accidentally, released three pumas on Dartmoor. During the late 1980s and early 1990s I used to have lunch with her husband, Roger Cawley, once a year at an animal show in Sussex. On several occasions Mary was present as well. I was already very interested in introduced species and had come across several historic records of pumas being seen in Devon. As Mary and Roger had been involved in several zoos and wildlife parks, the conversation was often steered towards this topic.

There is no doubt that the Chipperfield family was the main driving force behind Plymouth Zoo. It was always going to be a short-term operation whilst the safari parks were set up. Plymouth was primarily a quarantine station where animals completing quarantine could familiarise themselves with the public before being moved on. Some became a more permanent residential attraction and the visitors got to know them. When Plymouth Zoo closed in early 1978, there was actually only one puma there, not five. The majority of the animals went to Longleat, the bigger Chipperfield base, and some to Bournemouth Zoo, which has since closed. Unfortunately Ellis Daw, the former owner of Dartmoor Wildlife Park, suggests in his book *From the Lamb to the Tiger* that he acquired two pumas from Plymouth Zoo when it closed.

In fact it seems more likely that these two animals arrived earlier, when a small zoo in Gunnislake, just across the border in Cornwall, was forced to close by the local authority in October 1970, and two pumas were moved on from there. The idea of putting two – or even five – adult pumas into a cage with an existing established group, which is what would have happened in 1978, is just ridiculous. If attempted, there would have been carnage. As mentioned in my book *Mystery Cats of Devon and Cornwall*, puma sightings had occurred within 20 miles (32km) of Dartmoor Wildlife Park as early as 1966, before they were on show in Dartmoor Wildlife Park, and one witness even went to Plymouth Zoo to see their pumas to confirm his identification of what he had seen.

Since the publicity concerning the escaped lynx, Danny Bamping, aka The British Big Cat Society, has issued a press release stating that his experts would like to see all large dangerous zoo animals fitted with a "GPS microchip" to enable them to be found immediately in the event of escape. However, such devices do not exist outside Clive Cussler's *Oregon Files* novels, nor is there a prospect of them existing for many years yet. I accept that the *idea* is patented, but so are many ideas that are just not yet practical.

Chris M Moiser
Director, Tropiquaria Zoo, Washford Cross, Somerset

Hummers

Paul Giamatti asked for help regarding a 17th century ritual of disguised men going from house to house sweeping and making a buzzing sound [**FT339:73**]. In the North of England, particularly along the Yorkshire-Lancashire border, a similar custom existed until the mid 20th century. In the early part of the 20th century many houses still had cast iron 'ranges' consisting of a fire grate with an oven to one side and often a water boiler to the other. These ranges were polished with a substance called 'black lead' and were the pride of every housewife. Around New Year, children would visit the houses with brushes, dustpans and 'black lead' and on being admitted to the house would proceed to sweep the hearth and polish the range while humming all the time, and with the expectation of receiving a small reward. They were known as mummers although no mumming play was enacted as part of the ceremony.

I recall seeing the remnant of this custom one evening in the Black Swan public house in Todmorden around the year 1965. Two children entered the pub with dustpan and brush, humming all the time until they received a reward and before being shown the door.

By the 1960s most houses had replaced the old cast iron range with modern tiled fireplaces and although it is likely to be an urban legend, it was said that on some occasions the children applied the black lead to the newly installed fireplace. It must be presumed that what they received for their efforts was not what they expected. [See also **FT341:71**]

Garry Stringfellow
Sowerby Bridge, West Yorkshire

Ghosts and glaucoma

Ghostwatch [**FT343:18-19**] mentions that seeing figures in the peripheral vision "is a feature found in other apparitional sightings as well as a folkloric motif, as those knowing their fairy lore will recognise". When people have a defective area in their visual field, the brain makes a 'best guess' at what is being seen within that area – and often guesses wrong, commonly 'seeing' human figures. This is dignified with the title Charles Bonnet syndrome, after the doctor who first recognised it in his father, and in later life in himself. It's not uncommon in people with glaucoma or macular degeneration.

My mother, who had fairly advanced glaucoma, often saw people in the room with her when she knew she was alone. She was afraid to mention this in case people thought she was losing her marbles. So, firstly, if you have a relative with glaucoma or macular degeneration, ask them if they see things that aren't really there – and if so reassure them that it is just physiology and not a sign of going gaga. Secondly, if you 'see' something from the corner of your eye that actually isn't there, go and visit an optometrist and make sure they check your visual fields – you could have undiagnosed glaucoma – or conceivably macular degeneration, although you are likely to be aware of this from distorted or blurred vision. Glaucoma treatment has become much more effective over the last decade or so, so it's worth finding out; and conversely, in the past fewer people were diagnosed and of those nobody was effectively treated.

Alan Donnelly
Norwich
Editor's note: For more on Charles Bonnet syndrome, see **FT98:19, 125:14, 159:25, 184:46-49, 321:54-55**.

Wrong colours

In his excellent report on the Weird Weekend North [**FT343:20-21**], Rob Gandy got the colours wrong when describing my talk on "Hooded Entities". The 7ft (2m) tall entity seen on Backstone (not Black Stone) Circle on Ilkley Moor was green, and the small entities were black, not brown. The fact that, due to technical difficulties, I couldn't show the accompanying slides probably led to the wrong colours being mentioned. I am still interested in collecting other reports of *black* hooded, or cloaked, entity sightings. People can contact me via West Yorkshire Pagan Meetup.

Steve Jones
By email

Marby and the Martians

I enjoyed Theo Paijmans's 'Blast from the Past' about Friedrich Bernhard Marby [**FT343:28-29**]. Spiritualists and others reporting telepathic communication with Martians or astral journeys to the red planet were one of the more unusual consequences of the Martian 'canal craze' of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the debate about intelligent life on the planet entangled with it. There have been several recent surveys of this episode,[1] but Marby was completely new to me.

I can, however, perhaps throw a little light on why, in 1924, Marby thought that "the Americans had tried to communicate with people on Mars". The possibility of receiving radio signals from Mars had been discussed intermittently since the turn of the century.[2]

The idea was first raised by Nikola Tesla (1856-1943).[3] In 1901 he reported detecting extraterrestrial signals while experimenting with radio transmission using high-voltage equipment at his laboratory at Colorado Springs, Colorado. The idea surfaced intermittently over the next couple of decades, but achieved prominence again around 1920 when Guglielmo Marconi (1874-1937) reported detecting extraterrestrial signals with equipment on his yacht during an Atlantic crossing. All

letters

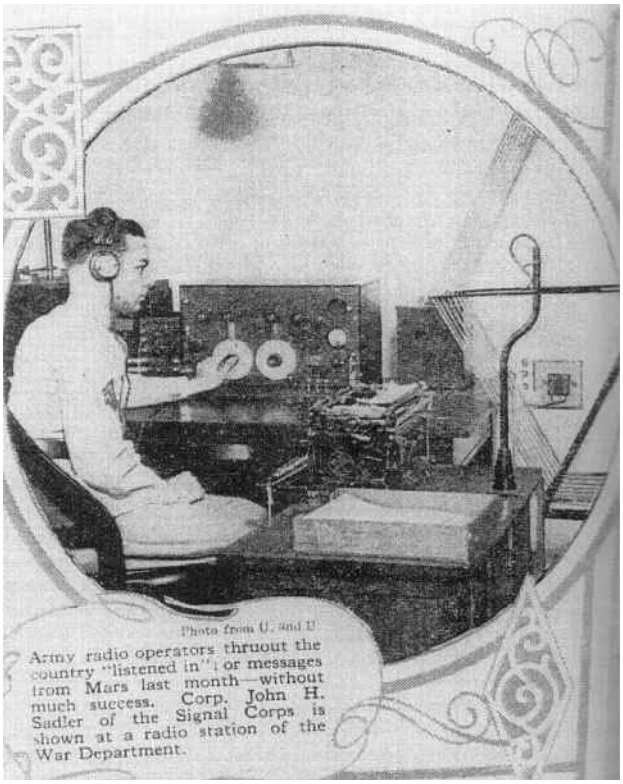
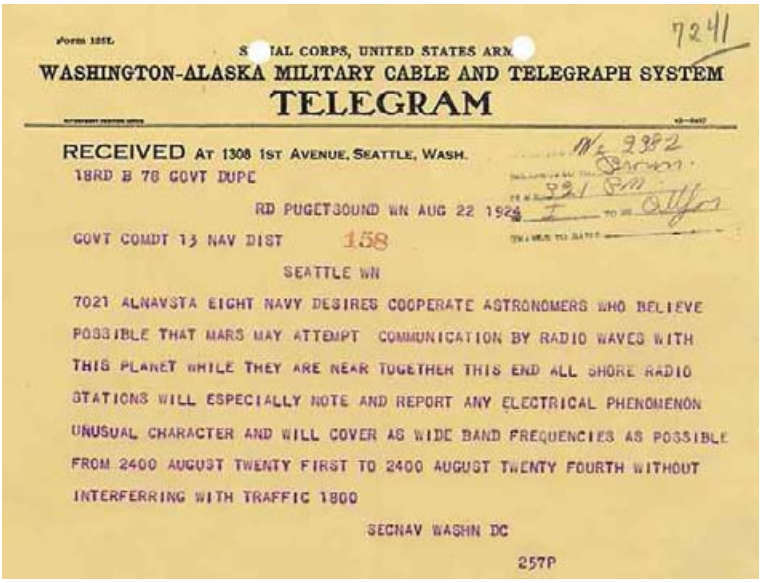


Photo from U. and U.
Army radio operators thruout the country "listened in" for messages from Mars last month—without much success. Corp. John H. Sadler of the Signal Corps is shown at a radio station of the War Department.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LEFT: An operator at a US Army signal station listens for radio transmissions from Mars during the 1924 opposition, as reported in the October 1924 edition of *Radio Age*, p27 (reproduced in Steven J. Dick, *Life on Other Worlds*, 1998 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press), p.202).

ABOVE: Telegram from Admiral Edward W Eberle (1864-1929), Chief of US Naval Operations, ordering signal stations to listen for transmissions from Mars during the 1924 opposition (courtesy Keith Cowing; see http://spaceref.com/onorbit/government-sponsored-seti—in-the-1920s.html, accessed 14 Aug 2016).

these developments were reported in newspapers and magazines but rarely featured in scientific journals.

However, I suspect that the actual trigger for Marby was the 1924 opposition of Mars. Oppositions occur when the planet is unusually close to Earth, and hence were considered well timed for radio communication (they are also the best times for more conventional observation, which is why they are important to astronomers).

The American astronomer David Todd (1855-1939)[4] had somehow persuaded the American government to suspend non-essential military and naval wireless traffic for the day of the opposition and to use their signal stations to listen for messages from the putative Martians. Needless to say, no signals were detected, but the experiment was widely reported. Mars's 1924 opposition was on 23 August, whereas Marby's article appeared in the April 1924 issue of *Der Eigene Weg*. So, if Todd's project did influence Marby, it must have been through advance publicity; I believe that it was well advertised in advance.

Todd had a history of Martian escapades. Earlier in his career he had worked with Percival Lowell, leading an expedition to a high-altitude mountain site in Chile in an attempt to photograph the canals. In 1909 he planned an attempt to listen for signals from Mars using a radio receiver borne aloft in a manned high-altitude balloon. In the event this somewhat ill-thought-through scheme was not carried out.

Paijmans also mentions that Marby warned that the terrestrial atmosphere was populated by malignant demons under the influence of the star Algol, and suggests the German film *Algol – the Tragedy of Power*[5] as the inspiration.

This explanation is certainly plausible: the film was released in 1920, so the timing is right. However, it is not the only possible explanation. Algol was always the demon star and considered ill-omened. The name is Arabic in origin, an abbreviation for *ra's al-ghūl* (the Demon's Head) and has been in use in the West since the 10th century.[6]

Algol is otherwise β Persei, the second brightest star in the constellation of Perseus. The traditional depiction of the constellation shows Perseus carrying the head of the Gorgon that he has slain, with Algol featuring as one of her eyes. When the Greek constellations passed into Arab culture, the Gorgon became a demon, hence the name. Algol is a variable star (strictly speaking an eclipsing binary) with a period of about 2½ days and a change in brightness large enough to be noticeable to the naked eye. In the mediæval West the stars were believed to be unchanging, so the variability went unremarked (or at least unrecorded), but Arab astronomers noticed it and referred to it as the Demon's eye blinking.

Clive Davenhall
Morningside, Edinburgh

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1 The most comprehensive recent survey of Mars and Spiritualism is Chapter 7 of Robert Crossley, *Imagining Mars*, 2011 (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press), pp129-148. There is also useful material in Chapter 8 of Jerome Clark, *Hidden Realms, Lost Civilizations and Beings from Other Worlds*, 2010 (Detroit: Visible Ink), pp129-168 and Gareth Medway, 'Mediums, Mystics and Martians', *Magonia* #99 (2009), pp3-9.

2 Steven J Dick gives a detailed description of these developments in *The Biological Universe: the Twentieth-Century Extraterrestrial Life Debate and the Limits of Science*, 1996 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp401-410, and I follow his treatment here.

3 For a recent biography see W Bernard Carlson, *Tesla: Inventor of the Electrical Age*, 2013 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press); reviewed by David Hambling [**FT338:62**].

4 Henry L Giclas, 'Todd, David Peck', in T Hockey (ed), *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Astronomers*, 2007 (New York: Springer), pp1143-44.

5 Hans Werckmeister (Director), *Algol. Tragödie der Macht* (Algol: Tragedy of Power), 1920. See also:

https://dcairns.wordpress.com/2014/05/18/

http://ithankyouarthur.blogspot.co.uk/2014/12/stumm-kraftwerk-algol-tragedy-of-power.html

A restored version is listed as in preparation by *Edition Filmmuseum:*

www.edition-filmmuseum.com/

(all URLS accessed 14 August 2016).

6 See, for example, Paul Kunitzsch and Tim Smart, *Short Guide to Modern Star Names and their Derivations*, 1986 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz), p49 and Ian Ridpath, *Star Tales*, 1988 (Cambridge: Lutterworth), pp102-105.

it happened to me...

Have you had strange experiences that you cannot explain? We are always interested in reading of odd events and occurrences. CONTACT US BY POST: **FORTEAN TIMES, BOX 2409, LONDON, NW5 4NP** OR E-MAIL TO **sieveking@forteantimes.com** Or post your message on the **http://forum.forteantimes.com**.

First-hand accounts from *Fortean Times* readers and posters at forum.forteantimes.com

Restless rest room

In 1969, when I was 19, I got a job typing accounts sheets for Chartered Accountants called Charles E Dolby. They had offices in old chambers at 11 Dale Street on the corner of Dale Street and Hackins Hey, Liverpool – an ancient decrepit building that would have made a perfect film-set for a Dickensian drama. I guess nothing had changed since the 18th century; I think the date above the door was 1779. A few other businesses occupied this building. I worked on the ground floor in a tiny office with two other girls. About six article clerks had the next office. They were paid buttons because they were training to be accountants, but actually did most of the work.

When this building was first built it must have had some sort of water closet, but not a type we would recognise. There can't have been a room especially for that purpose because the office toilets were located on the top floor up four flights of stairs and were inside a very large room, definitely not intended for toilet facilities; such a waste of space, especially as most of the offices were tiny cramped little rooms. This huge room had about eight toilets in cubicles in a line opposite the only door. They were on a higher level, so you had to climb up a step. The floor was old wooden boards, unpolished and untreated. All the offices had their own key to this room and the door was of very heavy solid oak, with a new Yale lock, so it locked behind you. Outside the steps leading up to this door were made of concrete, obviously a later addition – no wood in sight. I suspect there were original back stairs somewhere.

I've been in many haunted places such as Dean Hall, supposedly the most haunted house in England, and many old pubs and halls with ghosts, and have never felt a thing, not the slightest vibe. I would have no problem staying the night in them. I even went on a ghost walk when one of the group was totally spooked because she felt a little hand slip into hers, but there was no one there, or rather no one visible. The rest of the group were frightened, but I didn't feel a thing. So it is really amazing that whenever I entered this room at the top of the offices I could feel an atmosphere immediately – so much so that I would only use these toilets if I was absolutely desperate. The minute I entered there was a total quietness; it was freezing and it felt as if I were being watched. It was absolutely, terrifyingly scary. I never mentioned this to anyone. No one else seemed to be bothered; all the staff used the toilets whenever they needed to without comment.

> "I had to pluck up the courage to make a run for it through a crowd of ghosts"

One morning I decided to get in early. All the end-of-year accounts had to be typed and I wanted to get a head start, so I caught an earlier train from Rock Ferry to James Street Station. I picked up the mail on the way into the building and instead of opening up our office, I needed the loo, so without thinking I got the key off the hook in the outer office, ran up the stairs, opened the big old door and, dropping the mail onto a sink, went into our office's loo. As soon as I locked the door, the whole room erupted into bedlam. I went into a state of total shock and couldn't move a muscle. The room outside the cubicle was filled with the sound of wooden clogs running and jumping on the floorboards. Raised and high-pitched voices were so terrible I felt that if I opened the door I would be faced with lunatics in an uncontrollable frenzy. I stood unable to move for 15 to 20 minutes, and all the while pandemonium was on the other side of that thin wooden door with gaps above and below. Even writing this, my heart is racing – I have never known fear like it.

I realised I had to pluck up the courage to make a run for it through a crowd of crazed ghosts. I was well aware that whatever was making all that noise was not of this Earth and was definitely not friendly. After a few false starts and shaking with fear I flung the door wide to find… an empty, freezing room, almost humming with silence. It was as if someone had just flicked a switch and turned off a blaring radio. I ran for the door, forgetting the post and in a fumbling panic got out of there. When I reached my office, I was shaking, almost hysterical. So much time had passed that everyone was there working.

I never went into that room again. Nothing would induce me to enter it. If ever I needed the loo, I would use the facilities at Exchange Station. Soon after, I left that company and went to live in Portugal.

I contacted Tom Slemen, the writer of over 30 books about Liverpool's history, folklore and ghosts. My story appeared in *Haunted Liverpool 19*. He told me that in this location there had been many timeslips where, for instance, people have walked into a pub and found it full of military men and soldiers on leave from WWII, with women dressed in 1940s style; or they step out of a shop and everywhere has changed to how it was over a century ago.

Years later I found myself in Liverpool and discovered that the old chambers had gone. I wonder if the ghosts also went, or have they found their way into the new building?

Sandra Johnson
Mouldsworth, Cheshire

Haunted hearth

SD Tucker asks whether readers have any personal stories of haunted ovens, chimneys, or hearths [**FT342:36-40**]. Many years ago, a friend and I ventured down to Martha's Vineyard, one of the islands off the cost of Massachusetts, in the greyest depths of November. My friend's family owned a house there and November was one of the quieter times on the island, a time when mostly only the people who actually live on the island year-round were present. We rode the ferry out and it was grey and blustery. There was a beautiful good-sized hearth in the house. Before we settled in for the night we built a roaring fire and warmed ourselves in front of it, a necessity rather than a luxury in New England in late November. I'm proud of my long, thick hair and took the opportunity to wash it and let it dry in front of the fire as I brushed it out. When we retired for the night I left my brush in front of the hearth. The next morning it was missing. I mentioned it to my friend and she laughed. She told me that her grandmother, whose house it originally was, also took pride in her long hair and would make a habit of washing it, brushing it out, and letting it dry in front of a nice fire. She speculated that her grandmother had taken my brush in solidarity… or perhaps as a token of something she missed. I never found the brush and had to get another one when I got back to the mainland.

Allison Rich
Rhode Island

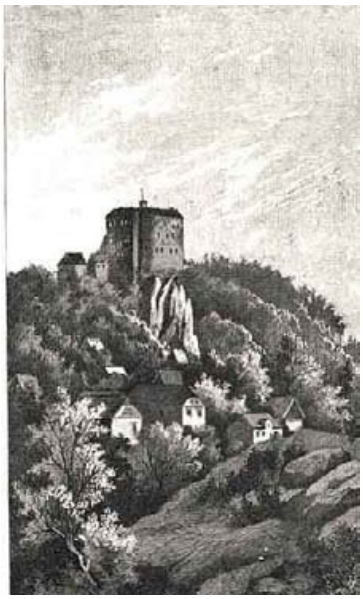
FORTEAN TRAVELLER

108. Hrad Houska, Czech Republic

MARK TOWSE travels to a strange castle said to be built over a gateway to Hell, haunted by a dead alchemist and home to Nazi occult experiments...

MARK TOWSE

It's hardly forensic fortean analysis, but the debate about the 'most haunted' place on the planet is a regular feature of the myriad websites detailing haunted historical hotspots – and one location in the Czech Republic makes the top 10 every time. Hrad Houska (*Hrad* meaning 'fortified castle'), 30 miles (50km) north of Prague, has been steeped in occult and mystical lore long predating the present structure, and remains an enigma that actually lives up to its mythological hype. So famous is the Castle and its immediate surrounding area that Hitler is said to have set up an SS 'paranormal unit' during the World War II occupation of the Czech Republic – allegedly to open a gateway to Hell. However, when looking at Houska's bizarre history, the recent – and still classified – interdimensional experiments of the Nazis pale in comparison to Houska's morbid past.



ABOVE: Located in the middle of nowhere and with no discernible reason for existing, Hrad Houska remains a mystery.

LEFT: The castle seen in an old engraving.

Before moving on, it's important to deal with the elephant in the room. Yes, Hrad Houska plays up to its history something rotten. A quick glance at the website – covered in fake plastic devils and a mocked-up mediæval torture chamber – is enough to make anyone cringe. Add to this the fact that two American ghost hunting TV shows having visited and filmed, each making some over-sensational claims, and the whole Hrad Houska story seems to groan under its own cliché-ridden weight.

Houska's legacy of strange phenomena, though, spans a similar timeframe to the whole of the UK's post-Saxon history: that's quite a pedigree of weirdness. I visited Houska's *Castellan* (Castle Warden) to try and dig a little deeper than the well known stories you can find on any number of websites; with that said, I'll outline the more famous ones to bring you all up to speed. It should be noted that, quite apart from these stories, the incidence of ghost sightings, strange noises and unusual feelings reported at Houska are predictably regular occurrences, not just unusual one-offs.

HOUSKA'S BEGINNINGS

About 900 years ago, what is now the Czech Republic was founded in the area of modern-day Prague in Bohemia. In an inaccessible region of swamps and rocks to the north of the capital, a gaping hole was found, going directly down into the Earth. Nobody could see the bottom, and stories of half-man, half-animal hybrids crawling out the abyss and legions of flying monsters circling it soon led to it being recognised as the entrance to Hell. An unsurprising conclusion, perhaps, for superstitious Central European folk of the time, and the stories stirred up such concern that King Ottokar II (reigned 1253-1278) dispatched an investigatory unit, complete with a group of prisoners who would be pardoned if they agreed to be lowered on a rope into the hole. The men who descended returned to the surface with their hair turned white, and those who hadn't been driven mad confirmed the stories of strange and terrifying beasts.

King Ottokar, so legend says, then built Castle Houska as a protection against this open sore in his lands, with the castle's chapel being placed directly over the gateway to Hell. Although we do not know for certain that Hrad Houska was built by Ottakar, it was mentioned in a chronicle of the 1500s and was known to have existed for several hundred years at that point. Bizarrely, and

MARK TOWSE

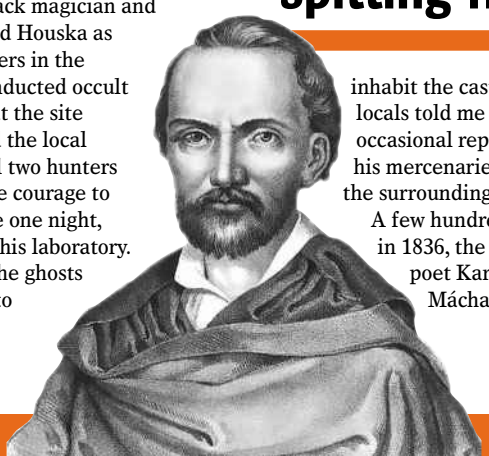
unlike those of any normal castle, all the battlements of Hrad Houska face inwards, towards the square central court – as if to keep something *in* rather than out. Every external wall is empty of anything except windows, which are large and for the most part easily accessible.

Given that the nation was young and had limited resources, and that Houska is reputedly only the second castle built in Bohemia (following the construction of one in Prague), perhaps the reports of Hellish terrors *were* taken seriously. There is no water in the region around the castle, and its siting appears to have had no strategic importance and enjoys no significant vantage points from which to monitor invading forces; it is still – as it has always been – in the middle of nowhere.

Perhaps Ottokar recognised the potentially destabilising potential of having a gateway to the infernal regions – even if just a superstitious rumour – located a stone's throw from his new capital. Perhaps he reasoned that it was better to make a gesture of appeasement to such wild stories than to ignore them and let them spread. But this was merely the start of over 800 years of weird phenomena, all focused on Hrad Houska.

CENTURIES OF WEIRDNESS

During the 30 Years War (1618-1648), the story goes, a Swedish mercenary commander called Oronto, who was allegedly a black magician and alchemist, used Houska as his headquarters in the region. He conducted occult experiments at the site and terrorised the local villagers, until two hunters plucked up the courage to visit the castle one night, killing him in his laboratory. His is one of the ghosts still believed to inhabit the castle, and Houska locals told me there are still occasional reports of ghosts of his mercenaries being seen in the surrounding area.



A few hundred years later, in 1836, the famous Czech poet Karel Hynek Mácha visited Houska and on entering the chapel built over the original gateway to Hell, started having visions in which his soul was sucked down into the pit and then projected nearly 200 years into the future. He said that in his vision he was shown moving pictures in a handheld casket by a young woman and walked around huge sandstone "cliffs" riddled with holes that shone with an eerie yellow light – seemingly a reference to the huge blocks of *sidliště*, the large apartment blocks that surround modern Prague. He also recounted seeing huge, self-moving metal machines spitting fire – which sound rather like tanks from the Nazi or Soviet occupations, or possibly modern cars. Lest we forget, this was in 1836, and it seems to be a

BOTH PICS: MARK TOWSE

He recounted seeing metal machines spitting fire

TOP LEFT: A capraphobe's nightmare.

TOP RIGHT: The chapel, built over the supposed entrance to Hell.

ABOVE LEFT: The castle's inner walls.

ABOVE RIGHT: The door to the reputedly haunted dungeon.

LEFT: Czech poet Karel Hynek Mácha.

fairly accurate vision of certain 20th-century technological developments. Mácha's story was related in private correspondence to Edward Hindle rather than printed in the papers of the day. Given his reputation as a literary genius, he never needed or courted publicity, so it seems fair to take the visions he experienced at Houska at face value. If he was telling fibs, he still seems to have made some impressive guesses about the future.

Bringing Houska into the modern era, we have the alleged involvement of the Nazis. We know that the SS occupied the castle, and it was rumoured that Heinrich Himmler visited in person. Did he have a mandate to see if Houska could be used as a portal to other dimensions, or to tap into some dark and demonic force? Given Nazism's much discussed links to various forms of occultism, perhaps it's not that much of a stretch, especially given Houska's history. Official records pertaining to the SS's presence were all destroyed as the Nazi war effort floundered; however, immediately after the war, the castle was used as a convalescent home and stories began to circulate...

This is where Houska gets really interesting: enter CastleWarden Miroslav Konopásek…

INTERVIEW WITH A CASTELLAN

Mark Towse: Many ghostly sightings have been reported over the years. Are there any particular 'hot-spots' in the castle? What strange experiences do people report when visiting?

Miroslav Konopásek: The main castle gateway has the most reported sightings, and most occur during the day, rather than at night – which I understand is unusual for haunted locations. Many people have problems with the castle when they visit – some cannot bring themselves to enter. We have, in the past, allowed people to stay overnight – not just TV shows but interested ghost hunters – and several have left suffering from depression, hysteria or extreme panic. I can understand that people who know the castle's history might experience such things when they realise they are in Houska and alone – but often they report intense feelings of *not being alone*...

MT: Houska's location is strange, to say the least – would the area perhaps have been more suitable for a castle 900 years ago?

MK: Nobody knows exactly why, when or by whom Houska was built – we have only limited records from Ottakar's time. The local forests, even back then, were impenetrable and not even suitable for hunting. The overall construction really seems to suggest that the builders wanted to keep something in.

TOP: A devil in wrought iron adds to the atmosphere.

ABOVE: Castle Warden Miroslav Konopásek – a man with many strange stories to tell.

MT: Houska was reconstructed a decade ago and made into a tourist attraction. Other haunted locations often report increased unusual activity when work or modifications are carried out [see Peter McCue, "Renovation Hauntings", **FT268:30-35**]. Did anything unusual occur during this period?

MK: Some craftsmen carrying out the repairs and reconstruction really did not want to be alone here, day or night. They apparently had strange feelings. When I came to Houska myself, for the whole first year I had the feeling that someone was behind me… it was uncomfortable. Once, therefore, I went alone into the dark castle, stood in the middle of the courtyard and scolded this "presence". I told this "something" that if it did not want me there, then I would leave, but if I stay, this harassment has to stop. Since then the "presence" has gone and I've felt fine here.

MT: I'm interested in the Nazi occupation of the castle. There are rumours that occult experiments were carried out and that the castle was used as a stud farm for pumping out Aryan babies. We know nothing official, as the Nazis destroyed all evidence and documents on leaving. What light can you shed on this period?

MK: From the time of World War II, there are no official documents. We only have stories of what happened. The Germans were careful to clean Houska completely. I have been promised documents from people in Germany and Norway, but they unfortunately remain only promises. Former Minister of Culture Stepanek visited me a few years ago and over coffee told me that the Ministry of the Interior is hiding something, and it only remains for the documents to be declassified. Apparently, in the final days of the conflict, Houska was involved with a last-ditch Nazi attempt to win the war. Selected individuals allegedly attended an occult ceremony, but they all died. Evidently, something went wrong.

MT: Three German soldiers were found in a shallow grave after the Nazis pulled out – are these soldiers the only corpses found in the grounds, or have there been others?

MK: We found out about the dead Nazi soldiers due to Houska being used as a convalescent home for the young and disabled immediately after the Nazi occupation. We know what happened immediately after the Nazis evacuated thanks to stories from people who actually stayed there. Soldiers visited Houska and locked the castle, with its patients inside, for three days. The soldiers dug up the courtyard, and this is when the bodies were found. During this time, the castle was searched thoroughly by uniformed men – I was told that they had strange uniforms, neither police nor soldiers. After the war, apparently, a complete library containing books of occult literature and Jewish Kabbalah was found and removed somewhere.

PHOTOS: MARK TOWSE

PHOTOS: MARK TOWSE

MT: What was the first recorded supernatural incident at the site?

MK: We have no records that far back, at least outside of the castle's mythology, but before the castle was even built the vicinity was referred to as "The Devils' Place" on old maps. So the stories of occult associations in ancient times certainly seem viable. There was a wooden fort known in this location, possibly dating back to the 900s – but who can say what else might have gone on around this area so long ago?

MT: Are there any other unusual stories about Houska that are not commonly known?

MK: I don't want to compromise Hrad Houska's real history with unproven stories, like the rumoured visits from Hitler and other high-ranking Nazis, but there is one story that certainly adds to Houska's legacy of strangeness. It was rumoured for many years that Houska has one more window on the outside, looking in, than there are windows on the inside. Utter nonsense, is it not? Well, how about this? Just six years ago in one of the ground floor rooms, the earth floor slid away, and the missing window returned to the world! A hidden room had been discovered, which the last inventory of the castle, in the 18th century, had not recorded. The window of the room was visible on the outside, but completely inaccessible due to a 20m cliff-like drop – so it kept its secrets up until very recently!

MT: Finally, Houska is most famous for being built over a 'gateway to Hell', with the battlements built on the inside to keep the demonic forces trapped and away from the Bohemians of the day. What do you make of this idea?

German soldiers were found in a shallow grave after the Nazis pulled out

MK: I personally believe that Houska is one of the places that are called the "centres of the world" or the *Axis Mundi*. There are reported to be places such as these around the globe, which have great power, and of course our ancestors had great respect for them and worshipped them. The institutionalised Church came up with another mercenary philosophy to keep people away from these places: perhaps Hrad Houska was said to be a gateway to Hell to keep people away from its power…

INCONCLUSIONS

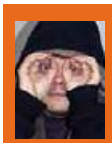
As for the actual 'gateway to Hell', the floor in the chapel is made of massive slabs of sandstone, and the current owners refuse to let any excavations take place in the chapel because of potential damage to its unique pagan-Christian frescoes. These show St Michael slaying a dragon, but also the only known representation of a female centaur, with a bow in her left hand (always a symbolic association with Satan); it's the only such image to be found in a Christian chapel anywhere in the world. So, until an excavation can be carried out, we cannot say for certain if there is a gateway to Hell, a never ending *Axis Mundi*, or, at the least, a very deep hole.

ABOVE LEFT: The extra window with "no room" was found behind vegetation and the hidden chamber carved into the sandstone foundations was finally unearthed.

ABOVE RIGHT: The unique female centaur is surrounded by some of Europe's earliest frescoes of saints and angels fighting dragons and demons.

The construction of Houska alone, with its internal battlements and its bizarre location, makes the site something of a mystery. Factor in the ghost sightings and frequent reports of unusual experiences, and even if half of the stories are bunk, Houska remains a fascinating paranormal hotspot. Talking to villagers at the local pub, several recount stories of having seen shadows at the windows of the castle, and of feeling watched when they are alone in the vicinity of the castle.

Houska does have an undeniably strange "air" about it, as if there is something uneasy or wrong about the place: not very scientific, I know, but that's how it feels. After all, it has played host to flying monsters, a murdered black magician, a time-travelling Czech poet, an SS garrison and a secret occult library. The Czech government apparently still possesses classified documents, which the ex-Culture Minister claims relate to occult Nazi experiments to locate an alleged gateway to Hell. It all makes Borley Rectory look a little tame... FT



MARK TOWSE is a lifelong fortean and student of Western Hermetics. When not exploring the haunted Czech Republic, he runs an online ethnobotanicals company.

STRANGE AND SENSATIONAL STORIES FROM

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

51. HELP! MY BABY WAS TAKEN BY A .....

The above slightly cryptic headline describes a type of story that was a long-time *Illustrated Police News* favourite: a little baby is snatched by some threatening, dangerous animal. There is always an illustration depicting the animal running away with the helpless babe dangling from its jaws or talons. What happened next? You had to buy the *IPN* to find out!

All right, so you got your copy? Cor Blimey, just look at that one! A baby abducted by a monkey! In the small village of Manxbridge in Somerset, a certain Mr Judcote, a gentleman of private means, kept a large pet monkey named 'Hulch'. Believed to be quite harmless, the beast was allowed to roam wherever it pleased. One day in July 1870, Hulch bounded into a neighbour's garden and snatched a baby from the arms of another child. Gibbering and chattering, the monkey took off with his new companion, climbing an outhouse to throw off his pursuers. The parents were prostrate with anxiety; what would this filthy animal do with their defenceless little baby? Mr Judcote sent servants to search the grounds for Hulch, carrying various treats to lure the creature from the trees, but they found no trace of the monkey. After spending all day carrying the baby around, Hulch suddenly and unexpectedly came bounding up to some farm labourers and politely handed the baby over to them, as if he had become bored with this uninteresting toy. The infant was alive and unharmed. The *IPN* does not state what happened next, except that the parents were said to be equally prostrate with relief when their child was returned to them. Did they insist that Hulch be chained up, or even destroyed, or did they employ the monkey as a baby-sitter so their infant son might become the Tarzan of Somerset?

In September 1870, the wife of a farmer named Brown, living near Hacketstown in Ireland, went out to milk the cows. She left her little baby inside the house and latched the door. A few minutes later, she heard a servant give a yell, and saw a large sow running out of the house, carrying the baby in its mouth. The frantic mother ran after it into the sty, where she found the mangled remains of her child. At the coroner's inquest, it was concluded that, in some strange manner, the sow had been able to unlatch the door, enter the cottage and abduct the baby. It was also noted that the practice of leaving young children unattended was only too prevalent, and could be fraught with fearful consequences.

Later in 1870, a bad year for unattended children, a little boy named Walter Percival was playing with some other children

THE PARENTS WERE PROSTRATE WITH ANXIETY. WHAT WOULD THIS FILTHY BEAST DO WITH THEIR BABY?

ABOVE: 'Hulch' the monkey abducts the future Somerset Tarzan, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 9 July 1870.
FACING PAGE: A three-year-old boy is abducted by a wolf in Aragon, Spain; from the *Supplément Illustré* of *Le Petit Journal*, 25 January 1914.

ENFANT ENLEVÉ PAR UN LOUP

LEFT: "Stop the donkey, boys!" From the *IPN*, 19 November 1870.
ABOVE: "Stop the pig! Stop the pig!" From the *IPN*, 17 September 1870.
BELOW: "You naughty doggies!" From the *IPN*, 12 June 1880.

near Newtown (the report does not tell us which one). All of a sudden, a donkey came galloping by, grabbed Walter by the leg, and made off with him. When Walter screamed for assistance, his father and uncle, who had been playing in a football match nearby, came running. They stopped the donkey and belaboured it with sticks until it dropped little Walter, who was brought home and put to bed.

The strange behaviour of the donkey was much marvelled at. Since the beast had recently been worried and bitten by a dog, it was suspected that it might have been suffering from hydrophobia. Little Walter seemed to rally for a while, but his wounds were considerable; the suffering infant fell into a state of insensibility and expired the following day. What happened to the dog and the donkey was not recorded.

In June 1880, the Oxford housewife Mrs Emma Olds saw her large spaniel run out of an outbuilding, carrying something in its mouth. "There goes the dog", she observed placidly. The dog ran out into the street, where there was a great outcry, since the animal was carrying the body of an infant dangling from its jaws. Screaming and yelling with horror and revulsion, the Oxford townspeople desperately pursued the dog, but it disappeared into an alley. When Mrs Olds's spaniel was found, it seemed very well fed, and next to it was a round object, the head of the baby. The dog had shared its meal with some other disreputable-looking street mongrels. The curs would have been in immediate danger of being lynched, had not Mr Olds and a certain Mr Jelfs been able to explain the circumstances. In an outbuilding to the 'Three Pigeons' public house, near where the Olds family lived, an inquest had been held on the body of an infant found drowned in the Oxford and Birmingham Canal. The jurymen had adjourned the inquest to have a drink at the pub, since the dead baby was 'high' and smelt very badly. Although a pig-trough had been put over the little corpse, the hungry dog must have shoved it out of the way, stolen the corpse, and ran off with it. It is not known if the careless jurymen were content with putting the infant's head on a plate, to have it staring accusingly at them when the inquest was resumed, or whether they brought the dog along to 'represent' the rest of the child.

"Disgusting!" I can hear readers exclaim. "Can it get any worse?" Well, this is the *IPN*, so it certainly can – Join us next issue for "Help! My baby was just taken by – an enormous eagle!"

Jan Bondeson's collection of stories from the *Illustrated Police News*, *Strange Victoriana*, is now available from Amberley Publishing, priced £20. (www.amberley-books.com)

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Rachel Dove, West Yorkshire.

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Victor Wright, West Midlands

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Hannah Evans, Winchester

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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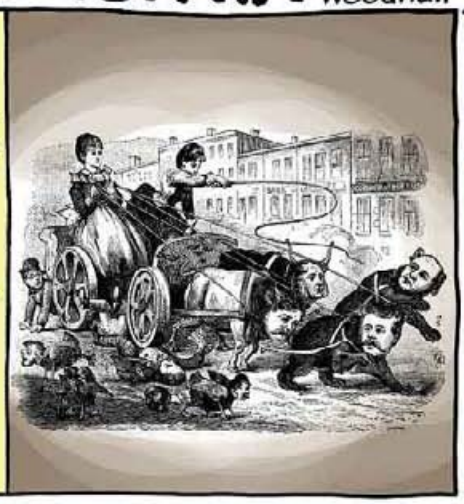
PHENOMENOMIX Victoria Woodhull Part 3

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

FEBRUARY 1870 –

OVERNIGHT, VICTORIA AND TENNESSEE WERE WEALTHY AND FAMOUS!

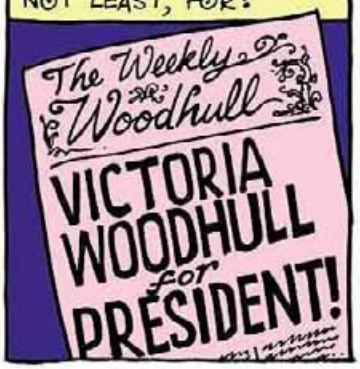
A POPULAR CARTOON SHOWED THEM RIDING A CHARIOT, BRANDISHING WHIPS AT THE "BEARS" AND "BULLS" OF WALL STREET WHO WERE PULLING THEM ALONG...



THEY MOVED INTO A GRAND HOUSE, TO WHICH BOTH PURE-MINDED SPIRITUALISTS AND GREEDY SPECULATORS RUSHED FOR WISDOM!

BUT! THE SPIRITS TOLD HER THAT SHE MUST BECOME A CHAMPION OF...

SO SHE AND TENNESSEE SET UP A WEEKLY PAPER TO ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN, FOR FREE LOVE, AND, NOT LEAST, FOR:



SOME WOMEN RALLIED TO THE CAUSE, ALONG WITH FREED SLAVES, BUT MOST MEN HATED HER!

CONSERVATIVELY INCLINED WOMEN WERE ALSO OUTRAGED!

WHEN ONE OF THEM TOLD VICTORIA SHE WAS WICKED, VICTORIA HAD A VISION OF THE WOMAN'S HEAD SURROUNDED BY RAT-LIKE DEMONS...

AT THE SAME TIME, VICTORIA CONTINUED TO HAVE SPECTACULAR VISIONS! ONE NIGHT, THE SPIRITS OF NAPOLEON AND JOSEPHINE WHISKED HER OFF TO PARIS, SEEING IT IN FLAMES!

IT WAS THE NIGHT OF THE FALL OF THE PARIS COMMUNE – 28 MAY 1871 – WHEN THE COMMUNARDS, IN A DESPERATE LAST STRIKE, BURNED DOWN THE TUILERIES AND THE QUAI D'ORSAY...

VICTORIA CONTINUED TO BE VILIFIED BY THE PRESS, WHO CALLED HER "MADAM SATAN"..

SHE WAS ARRESTED FOR "SENDING OBSCENE MATERIAL" THROUGH THE U.S. MAIL, AND IMPRISONED!

"MADAM SATAN" BY THOMAS NAST.

SHE WAS STILL IN PRISON AT THE 1872 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION! NOT A SINGLE VOTE WAS CAST FOR HER, AND THE NOTORIOUSLY CORRUPT GRANT WAS ELECTED FOR A SECOND TERM...

AFTER HER RELEASE, SHE FOUGHT A HUGE LAW-SUIT AGAINST HER PERSECUTORS! SHE WON, BUT THE STRAIN ALMOST KILLED HER; AND AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS REPORTED...

IN FACT, SHE CAME ROUND FROM A NEAR-DEATH STATE OF COMA AFTER SIX DAYS. BUT HER HEALTH WAS DAMAGED. SHE MOVED TO ENGLAND AND, IN 1883, SHE MARRIED A BANKER AND ENJOYED PROSPERITY FOR THE NEXT 40 YEARS. BUT AT HEART SHE WAS SAD... HER SPIRITS DESERTED HER...

SHE DIED IN 1927, ALL BUT FORGOTTEN. NOW, NINETY YEARS LATER, SHE IS SLOWLY BECOMING FAMOUS AGAIN – AS A PIONEERING CHAMPION OF RIGHTS FOR WOMEN, FOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS, AND FOR PERSONAL FREEDOMS!

OH, AND AS A GREAT OCCULTIST! HUZZAH VICTORIA!

COMING NEXT MONTH

WINGS OF TERROR

HELP! MY CHILD WAS JUST ABDUCTED BY A GIANT EAGLE!

FACES IN THE WINDOW

WINDOWPANE GHOSTS AND LIGHTNING DAGUERROTYPES

+

MEET THE MORMONS, STRANGER THINGS, MONTAGU SUMMERS, AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 347

ON SALE 10 NOV 2016

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A Bangladeshi-born imam was murdered by two Da'esh (ISIL) supporters who viewed his practice of using healing amulets as "black magic". Jalal Uddin, 71, was battered around the head and face with a hammer and left for dead in a children's playground in Rochdale, Greater Manchester. Mohammed Hussein Syeedy, 22, and Mohammed Abdul Kadir, 24, are said to have targeted the imam when they discovered last year that he practised *ruqya* healing. This involves the use of healing amulets known as *taweez,* that believers think can bring good fortune or ward off evil. Syeedy and Kadir stalked their "quiet, dignified and well-respected" victim, who had a deep knowledge of the Qur'an, before attacking him as he walked home from the mosque on 18 February 2016. Kadir fled abroad and is thought to be in Syria; Syeedy went on trial in August, protesting his innocence. *D.Telegraph, 24 Aug 2016.*

Two children died after their throats were slit by glass-coated strings used for flying kites on India's Independence Day, 15 August. Saanchi Goyal, three, and Hari, four, were looking out through the sunroof of their cars in different parts of Delhi when sharp strings slit their throats. Zafar Khan, 22, also died when a kite string looped around his neck as he rode his motorbike home. Kite strings – locally known as *manjha* – are treated with powdered glass or metal to bring down competitors' kites. They killed a five-year-old boy in 2015 in the northern town of Moradabad, and a five-year-old girl in Jaipur in 2014. They also kill and maim hundreds of birds; this year, at least 500 were admitted to the Charity Birds Hospital in Delhi on Independence Day and the two days following. The hospital said it treats up to 8,000 birds every year. The Delhi authorities have now banned sharpened *manjha*. *BBC News, 17 Aug; Irish Times, 18 Aug 2016.*

A woman was beheaded by a train as she had sex next to a railway track. An official said: "The woman was on top of her partner and when she heard an approaching train, she started to stand up. Right then, the speeding train tore her head off. Had she remained in her previous position, she would have stayed alive. The man survived." The accident happened in Russia on the Trans-Siberian line, near Ulan-Ude. The homeless couple were reportedly "both drunk". *D.Mirror, 15 July 2016.*

Ashar Niazi, 35, an IT engineer from Croydon, south London, died when he came off his Yamaha R1M superbike after being hit by a pigeon on the A22 near Godstone, Surrey, at around 7am on 14 August. He was with three friends, who saw the bird fly into him. The bird was also killed. *standard.co.uk, 14 Aug; D.Mail, 3 Sept 2016.*

James Zordel, 59, was killed when the motorbike he was riding at night hit a black cow on a blacktopped road about six miles (10km) south of Interstate 70 near Russell, Kansas. *Irish Examiner, 28 June 2016.*

A grizzly bear attacked and killed a mountain biker as he was riding along a trail just outside Glacier National Park in Montana on 29 June. Police officer Brad Treat, 38, and another rider were in the Halfmoon Lakes area of Flatland National Forest when they evidently surprised the bear, which knocked Treat off his bike. The second rider left to look for help and was not injured. There had been only 10 fatal bear attacks in Glacier National Park since it was created in 1910, the last being in 1998. *BBC News, 30 June; (Queensland) Courier-Mail, Sun, 1 July 2016.*

Tomas Suchy, 22, was crushed to death by a one-ton 'wall' of frozen fish. The Slovakian-born worker died when a stack of pallets toppled over and fell on him in a cold-store room at an Interfish factory in Plymouth, Devon, in October 2013. He died instantly from head injuries. There were 52 boxes each weighing 55lb (25kg) on each pallet. The stacks were piled up too high and workers should have been provided with hard hats. In June 2016, the fish firm was fined £500,000 for health and safety shortcomings. *Times, 22 June; Metro, 28 June 2016.*

A woman was mauled to death and another injured by Siberian tigers after they stepped out of their car while on a tour of Beijing Badaling Wildlife World on 23 July. Visitors are allowed to drive their own vehicles in the park, but are forbidden from getting out. The harrowing attack was captured on video. The first woman, who left the car because of an argument with her husband, sustained severe injuries. The second woman joined the husband and the car's driver in a rescue attempt, but was killed by another tiger. *[AP] 25 July; NY Daily Post, 26 July 2016*.

Juanita Gomez, 49, from Oklahoma City claimed her 33-year-old daughter, Geneva Gomez, was possessed by the Devil – and beat her to death on 27 August. She punched her repeatedly to "rid Satan from her body," according to court records. "She forced a crucifix and religious medallion down her throat until blood came out of her daughter's mouth." Geneva's body, carefully washed, was found on the floor in the shape of a cross with a large crucifix resting on her chest. Another murderous mother was Angela Blackwell, 27, from South Carolina, who killed her four-day-old son last February by putting him in the fridge for three hours. She faces 20 years to life. *D.Mirror online, 23+30 Aug; time.com, 1 Sept 2016.*

George and Pat Pitman married on St Valentine's Day 1959, and were married for 55 years. Pat was diagnosed with cancer on 11 November 2014, and was admitted to the University Hospital of North Tees two days later. When her health deteriorated, George was taken ill and was also admitted. As she slipped away on 20 November, he took her hand and said: "Close your eyes, I'm coming with you." His heart stopped 21 hours after her death. They were both 77. *D.Mail, D.Express, 28 Nov 2014.*

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